

NEPAL IN 2050

Where will Nepal be in 2050? It is only 25 years away. The country's population will be peaking at 36 million, the poverty rate will drop to near zero. Maternal and child mortality rates will fall further.

Nepal will be generating up to 40,000MW of hydro and solar power, more than half of that for export. Upgraded highways will improve connectivity, railways will make transport cheaper. Pokhara and Birganj will only be two hours away from Kathmandu. Nijgad airport could be Nepal's new aviation hub, reducing Kathmandu's congestion.

Nepal will hitch its wagon to the engines of economic growth in India and China. Investment and job creation will reduce outmigration, Nepal's data centres will be powered with surplus electricity. Remote areas will prosper with high-value tourists.

That is if all goes well. But if Nepal's politics remains dysfunctional with incompetent leadership, then the country will muddle along as it is doing now.

Society will be more unequal, public discontent may boil over as politicians resort to faith to hide failures, the exodus abroad of youth will continue.

Climate breakdown will exacerbate these crises. Global average temperature will have risen to 2.7°C above pre-industrial levels (it is 1.1°C now). The remaining Himalayan icecap will shrink by half, glacial lakes will threaten valleys. The hydrology of rivers will change, reducing dry season flow. Severe and prolonged heat waves in the Tarai will force people to migrate back to the mountains.

In the final analysis, it all boils down to a political system that is more accountable, and displays more integrity and efficiency.

FULL STORY PAGE 4-5

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Hydropower

Nepal needs reservoirs for energy and water management. Kosi High Dam (1), Budi Gandaki (2), Tanahu (3), West Seti (4) and Karnali Chisapani (5) have languished and will be up in the next 25 years. But dams carry seismic risk, relocation issues and geopolitical sensitivity. Nepal's Energy Strategy envisions 28,500MW installed capacity by 2035, and 40,000 by 2044 of which solar power could be 8,000MW by then.

Highways

Upgrading and expanding the national highway network is a low-hanging fruit to create employment during construction, and boost connectivity for investment and jobs once completed. By 2050, the East-West Expressway, Midhill Highway, and the Karnali, Gandaki, and Kosi corridors as well as the Birganj to Rasuwa route should be fully operational.

Transmission Lines

Because of annual rainfall, eastern Nepal generates more hydropower than the more arid west. Power needs to be evacuated from east to west through new transmission lines. By 2050, Nepal plans to export at least 18,000MW and trans-boundary power lines need to be built to augment those being built under the MCC project.

Railways

We should hope that the East-West Trunk Train line will be completed in the next 25 years. This will be a lifeline for cargo and passenger transport, making it less expensive and time consuming. Multimodal intersections can connect railway terminals with north-south highways. Trains may connect Birganj and Kathmandu before 2050, although the timeline for the Kerung-Kathmandu line is uncertain due to geological and geopolitical considerations.

Aviation

By 2050, domestic and international air travel will likely double. Even the expanded Kathmandu airport will not be able to handle additional traffic, and air travel will need to be decentralised to upgraded Bhairawa, Pokhara and possibly Nijgad airports. Domestic air travel will continue to grow on Tarai routes, and new aircraft technology by then will allow bigger planes to operate on smaller airfields in the mountains.

TARGET PRACTICE

	2025	2044
Per capita income	\$1,496	\$12,000
Population in Multiple Poverty Index:	17.4%	3%
Electricity generation:	3,500MW	40,000MW
Blacktopped highways:	14,300km	33,000km
Railroad:	113km	2,200km
Life expectancy	70.5 years	80 years
Maternal mortality rate:	142	20 (per 100,000 live births)
Child mortality rate:	30	8 (per 1,000 live births)
Literacy rate:	77%	99%
Higher education enrolment:	22%	40%

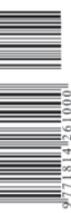
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Moving with the times

In the past 25 years, Nepali Times has changed with Nepal's changing media landscape



Sonia Awale

People who were 25 in 2000 when Nepali Times was launched are now 50.

Nepal has gone from monarchy to republic, from war to peace, but a lot has remained the same — same politicians in the same politics.

Our 25th anniversary Rewind Supplement (page A-L) in this edition shows that the more things change in this country, the more they remain the same. Nepal languishes and muddles along despite its enormous human capital and natural resources.

Nepali Times content has adapted to new English reading habits: it is less text-heavy, more visual, with better graphics. But issue #1271 does not look much different from #1: the same masthead and design, the same comprehensive coverage, and high quality printing and production values have been maintained for 25 years.

An entire generation has grown older reading this paper, joined now by a new cohort of younger readers. They are assured of

consistently high quality journalism on Fridays and online to explain, interpret and analyse what is happening and what to expect. It is content with context.

Journalism is history in a hurry, and this is even more true in the age of social media, the great amplifier. Marshall McLuhan's 'the medium is the message' has never been truer.

Social media is an important tool for dissemination, significantly increasing access to information for everyone. But it is also a breeding ground for disinformation, online bullying, and hate speech.

In countries around the world, populist leaders have weaponised social media to silence critics to the point where the truth is drowned out by lies, disempowering people and paralysing democracy. We are better informed than ever before, but this has not resulted in knowledge and wisdom, tolerance and understanding.

In the midst of all this, there is growing public distrust of the media itself as it is slandered on the social web, pressured by political and corporate interests. You would expect this in authoritarian states, but it is now happening in democracies with elected rulers.

When journalists should be the vanguard to protect freedom, the media industry itself is in crisis with falling revenue and distraction from devices. The independence



of a financially fragile media is being further compromised, its public service mandate undermined.

There is no choice but for newsrooms to reinvent ourselves: experiment with new revenue models, reorient content to engage and involve the new generation. This does not mean leaving it up to the algorithm to give them only what they like and agree with, but equip citizens with the information they need to make informed choices.

We journalists are creatures of habit. We like our facts, but we like our routine more. Journalists, mainstream or otherwise, need to be constantly updating themselves, not only on matters of the state but adapt to the new tools and technologies. We have to be on the platforms where our readers are, and learn to use the same tools that they are using.

Instead of fearing for our jobs because of AI, we have to learn to harness its ability

to do repetitive or time-saving newsroom chores. AI is not and should not be about content generation, but finding ways to reach our target audience.

This frees up time for journalists to do journalism: investigate, hold power to account, call out malpractice and wrongdoing, while commending good work. This will help us maintain credibility and trust, our most valuable assets. Fact-checking should not be a fad, it is part and parcel of journalism.

For us at Nepali Times, this 25th anniversary is a milestone and a time to plan for the decades ahead. It is time to look

back at the last 25 years, and to look ahead at where Nepal could be (or should be) in the next 25.

As we report on page 1 and 4-5, the prognosis for 2050 is not very good unless governance, accountability and transparency are improved. There is no silver bullet for this, it will come from the political will of a new generation of young leaders with the vision to overhaul the way this country is ruled. And that will depend most importantly on electoral reform — informed citizens electing representatives who show integrity and vision.

It has been a turbulent journey in Nepal for the last 25 years, and Nepali Times has tried to chronicle the highs and lows with honesty and fairness.

As the current Editor, I would like to thank all my predecessors and current colleagues for bringing us to this point.

Trending Online



Trees of life and living

by Durga Rana Magar
Chautara were once common rest stops in Pokhara, but as the city grows the shady spots are being replaced by concrete buildings and asphalt roads. Read full story at nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook



A Peace Corps volunteer

by Daniel W Edwards
Dorothy Mierow, a writer, teacher, and a naturalist, was one of the first Peace Corps volunteers to arrive in Nepal in 1962. Her time in Pokhara changed her life. Read online about her life and legacy.

Most popular on X

Resource curse

by Sonia Awale
Recent river disasters are a warning for Nepal not to rely only on hydroelectricity. The alternative to high risk high investment hydropower projects is energy diversification to other renewables such as solar, wind or biogas. Join the discussion online.

Most commented

Tourism needs a new push

by Sudiksha Tuladhar
Two years into the 'Visit Nepal Decade', tourist numbers have almost bounced back to pre-pandemic levels, yet weak promotion, poor infrastructure, and limited air connectivity still hold the sector back. Read the report on our website.

Most visited online page

Letters

ENERGY DIVERSIFICATION

I think the old saying of putting all your eggs in one basket fits this scenario ('Resource curse', Sonia Awale, #1271). It is important to try to keep to the agreed limits of the Climate Accord but it certainly won't be easy. There are many high rise buildings within cities that could quite easily erect solar panels. There is also a new version of wind turbines, short vertical bladed ones that could be fitted to tall street lights along the main highways or in less obtrusive locations. Now is the time to consider appropriate alternatives. There's no easy fix and there will always be compromises.

Ian Wall

■ If a country has natural resources, it should use them

wisely — sell them and earn foreign currency, which can then be invested in infrastructure and renewable energy. The truth is, without money, climate commitments are just talk. Developed countries — especially in the West — should take the lead in cutting fossil fuel use. Countries like Nepal must first focus on eliminating poverty and becoming economically strong. Only then can we realistically commit to climate goals.

Gaurab Raj Pandey

Although these recent disasters are a warning, don't write off hydropower yet. But Nepal should be also developing solar and wind power, and retaining sufficient electricity for a growing domestic market.

David Seddon

■ It would be best to stick to run-of-the-river projects while exploring alternative clean energy sources like solar and wind.

Ranjit Devraj

TOURISM

Relax the rules in Mustang, but don't do away with all the restrictions ('Lift restrictions on Upper Mustang', Sailendra Thakali, Guest Editorial, #1271).

Tony Jones

■ Nepal must make smart improvements to the tourism sector, starting right from the airport ('Tourism needs a new push', Sudiksha Tuladhar, #1271)

Gauri Rimal

■ This is sad to say, but bad roads, aircraft crashes, and pollution don't help Nepal's tourism prospects.

Roger Ray

DOROTHY MIEROW

Daniel's account of Dorothy's life and contributions is fascinating, and a delight to read (How the Peace Corps changed a volunteer's life, Daniel W Edwards, #1271)

Hem Sagar Baral

Quotes



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Nepal has made it to the list of Top Ten Solo Travel Adventure Destinations in the world. In his weekly newsletter, @kundadixit has tips on how to enjoy Nepal even more all by your lonely self.



HARjyal हेमन्त अर्ज्याल @HARjyal

..... the anticipation and excitement can be excruciating as a passenger ahead of you carries out a missed approach in the restroom at the back of the plane.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Nepal needs to reverse decades of family planning policy to face the declining birth rate. While some rural areas need population control, urban areas must adopt family-friendly measures, like in the Nordic countries, to support parents for childbirth.



Rita Thapa @bheribas

As First Chief of Nepal's FP-MCH Project in the '60s, I was pressured by donors to separate FP from MCH bcz of catastrophic "Population Explosion". I insisted integrating FP-MCH risking my job. Bcz lower the child mortality, lower is the fertility. Pleased, it is so here now!

Online Package



KATHMANDU'S CORRODING GODS

The Valley's centuries-old sacred religious artefacts have become eroded by vermilion, chemical-based dyes and offerings, and centuries of contact. Watch the video on YouTube.



WORKING FROM HOME

Tanka Nath Ghimire returned to Nepal from Qatar determined not to migrate anymore. He decided his destiny was in his own country. Now, Tanka and his wife Laxmi own and run the Ranimahal Resort in Awal of Palpa. Watch the video on YouTube and subscribe for multimedia content.

1,000 Words



WATCHDOG MEDIA: Nepali Times editorial staff (L-R) Sangya Lamsal, Vishad Raj Onta, Kiran Maharjan, Kunda Dixit, Sudiksha Tuladhar, Shristi Karki and Sonia Awale in the paper's dog-friendly newsroom this week.



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Mission 2050

If Nepal is to meet its socioeconomic goals in 25 years, it must have improved governance starting yesterday

Sonia Awale

- Melamchi Water Supply Project
- Pokhara International Airport
- Bhairawa International Airport
- Upper Tama Kosi Hydroelectric Project
- Kathmandu-Tarai Expressway

What do these biggest infrastructure projects in Nepal have in common?

All ended up being more expensive than they should, all have been delayed and are not fully operational, two were badly damaged in climate-related disasters that should have been foreseen.

The \$800 million Melamchi is Nepal's most expensive infrastructure project to date. It took 30 years to build, but was nearly destroyed by a glacial debris flow in June 2021. The headworks need major repairs.

The 456MW Upper Tama Kosi was severely damaged by a rockfall in last September's floods. It is still not operating at full capacity, and other hydropower plants were

damaged in recent glacial floods.

Pokhara and Bhairawa airports were supposed to be the new aviation gateways to Nepal to take the pressure off Kathmandu, and become game changers for tourism and pilgrimage. Nearly three years later, both handle domestic flights.

Poor and inadequate design, kickbacks on contracts, cost overruns, failure of diplomacy to get India's nod on air routes, and lack of planning and marketing have made the airports a pair of white elephants.

Some of these setbacks can be blamed on natural calamities, but mostly it is political incompetence and greed, lack of accountability and poor implementation. That is no surprise, since these are the hallmarks of doing business in Nepal, where projects are often delayed, adding to the cost, and even when completed they are already outdated.

That is the story of the last 25 years, are the next 25 going to be any different? Not if governance does not improve.

"What we really need for



BISHNU PRASAD GAUDEL / RSS

the future is vision, idea, and understanding, and then the domestic capacity to implement them," says infrastructure expert Surya Raj Acharya, who laments the total absence of technical and planning expertise.

"None of our national highways meet technical standards, our cities are unplanned. The priority was never on quality. Politicians sold us short-term infrastructure that have now become a barrier to prosperity," he adds.

One silver lining has been private sector involvement in hydropower, and the energy strategy aims to generate 11,769MW by 2030. But hydropower is high-investment, high-risk due to climate breakdown, and ecologically damaging.

"Hydropower is a good example of how government incentives and public-private partnership can work wonders, although we now have to take climate change into account," explains economist Kalpana Khanal of the Policy Research Institute.

She adds, "We now have to identify other key infrastructure areas that also enhance the growth of other sectors."

The National Planning Commission's periodic plans guide overall social and economic strategy for the country into the coming decade. Nepal's current five-year plan (2024-2029) has set a target of 7.3% annual economic growth against the current 3.9%, \$2,351 per capita income up from

\$1,456 at present, and poverty reduction to 12%.

The plan aims to export nearly half the hydropower generated by 2030, earning the country Rs41 billion annually. But there is no real coordination between line agencies, and bureaucratic lethargy leads to constant delays, says former member of the National Planning Commission (NPC) Min Bahadur Shahi.

"Development in Nepal is still very much synonymous with building roads and bridges, and infrastructure is rudimentary," he adds. "Elsewhere in the world, digital infrastructure and governance go hand in hand, we are far behind."

The frustration of the man who served in the National Planning



Turkish Kora

The Kathmandu Kora mountain biking championship around Kathmandu Valley was held on Saturday 19 July with 6,200 participants in various categories. For the first time there was also a 160km circuit. The carrier also sponsored a photography competition of the rally of which winners will be announced next week and can



win roundtrip tickets to Istanbul. Meanwhile, the Turkish Airlines flight code 'TK' will now be on Airlink flights on domestic and regional routes in and around South Africa, which will make for smoother connections and more efficient ticket bookings. "As Turkish Airlines, we give importance to this cooperation with Airlink so as to enhance our connectivity in South Africa and the region. We aim to improve our partnership to maximize the travel opportunities offered to our guests" said Turkish Airlines Chief Investment & Strategy Officer Levent Konukcu.

Shark Tank on TikTok

Shark Tank Nepal is uploading show clips and content to TikTok, its official entertainment partner. The show's official channel has amassed more than 40k follows and 1m likes. (Read story on Page 6)

TikTok is also the 'Powered By' partner of Himalmedia for this year's Media Mela on 25 July that will focus on mobile-first content creation and the increasing relevance of digital platforms in journalism. TikTok will conduct exclusive sessions on mobile journalism and video storytelling. Manisha Pande of NewsLaundry, Anup Kaphle of Rest of World and Sundeep Narwani of Narrative Research Lab are among presenters.

Bhote Kosi toll

The Rasuwa Customs Office has reported that the 8 July flood on the Bhote Kosi swept away 68 vehicles, including EVs, cargo vehicles from China, pickups, rollers, and tippers. The flood also took away the Miteri Bridge connecting Nepal and China, and damaged an under-construction cargo parking yard. China has pledged to rebuild the bridge, while trade has been rerouted through Kodari.

Manang tourists

There were 37,733 foreign tourists visiting Manang in FY 24/25, a 70% increase from the previous year. Of them, 2,554 were SAARC tourists, 4,358 from Israel, 3,616 from France, and 2,842 from Germany. Domestic tourists have also increased with road access.

Khalti, IME merger

Khalti and IME Pay have merged into the 'Khalti by IME' app, becoming Nepal's largest digital wallet in terms of capital base and registered users. The merger consolidates features such as IME's remittance services and inDrive payments, and Khalti's event and movie ticketing.



Aloft at Aamako Ghar

Aloft hotel in Thamel carried out hygiene treatment and gave out cookies and linen at Aamako Ghar, a non-profit shelter for homeless children and senior citizens.

Metlife signs captains

MetLife Nepal has signed Rohit Paudel and Indu Barma, the captains of the national men's and women's cricket teams, to promote the importance of life insurance.

Saurya crash report

An air crash investigation has found that the Saurya Airlines Bombardier CRJ200 crash at Kathmandu airport last year was caused by multiple factors including: faulty V1 air speed calculation, unsecured cargo that affected centre of gravity, and an abnormal angle of attack on takeoff that led to a deep stall. The investigation also pointed out that unauthorised passengers were on board a plane that was on a ferry flying to Pokhara for a C-check. Eighteen people were killed in the crash on 24 July 2024, but one of the pilots survived.



Mayadevi renovations

The Mayadevi Temple underwent renovations to its electrical wiring, drainage systems, ventilation, and painting. New walkways, doors, windows, lights and fans were installed too. The renovations took five months and cost Rs6.7m, which was supported by the Royal Thai Monastery.

NICCI x LBU

The Nepal-India Chamber of Commerce & Industry and Lumbini Buddhist University signed an MOU that plans to transform Lumbini into an international academic hub by improving academia-industry ties, internships and research.



ADB Nepal plan

Minister of Finance Bishnu Paudel launched the Asian Development Bank's Country Partnership Strategy for Nepal 2025-2029 that includes promoting private sector-led growth, boosting youth employment, and strengthening environmental sustainability and climate and disaster resilience.

9.4MW via solar

Three grid-connected solar power plants with a total output of 9.4MW are being built in Lamjung, Nawalparasi, and Karnali with funding from KfW with technical support from German consulting firm Gopa Tech at an estimated investment of over \$900k with completion expected in February 2026.



Forced evictions

Amnesty International's report 'Nowhere to go: Forced evictions in Nepal' details the government's failure to establish a regulatory framework for the Right to Housing Act, which has forced marginalised communities in Kathmandu, Siraha, Sunsari, Jhapa and Kailali out of their homes.



RADHIKA KANDEL / RSS

Commission is an indication of where the problem lies: in actually executing plans and implementing strategies.

“We need to prioritise projects based on our geography, climate, societal needs,” Shahi continues. “We want to push Nijgad airport when we can’t even operate Pokhara and Bhairawa. Have we even studied potential air routes and needs of international carriers?”

TARGET PRACTICE

Export of hydropower, manpower and lately information technology are the mainstays of Nepal’s economy, and will carry the country to its graduation from Least Developed Country status to

a developing country in November 2026, and hopefully to middle-income by 2030.

Nepal has an installed capacity of about 3,800MW, most of it from hydropower, and increased adoption of electric cars has reduced the import of petroleum products, decreasing the trade deficit with India. Meanwhile, Nepalis abroad sent home \$11 billion in remittances last year, and at least \$900 million in backend IT exports.

But demographer Yogendra B Gurung is not impressed: “Despite the reduction in the poverty rate, and our improving income status, life expectancy, income, even maternal and infant mortality are not on par with countries with similar economic status.”

He says relying on remittances is an unsustainable economic model, vulnerable to external factors and the money is mostly spent on day-to-day needs, and not invested in productive sectors.

Remittance is credited with reducing poverty in Nepal which is down to 20% from 42% in 1990. Money sent home by workers abroad has allowed families to afford basic healthcare and education, in turn helping to reduce childhood malnutrition and maternal mortality while improving female literacy.

But the progress has stalled in recent years, and many doubt Nepal will meet its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets. The National Planning Commission

NO FLY ZONE: Pokhara airport was supposed to be the new aviation gateway to Nepal but nearly three years after its inauguration, it mostly handles domestic flights.

The Daunne section of the Butwal-Narayangadh road notorious for traffic jams and accidents, it has been in never-ending construction for three years.

has said Nepal is likely to achieve just 60% of the targets by 2030. Sex ratio at birth (SRB), which is 112 boys to 100 girls in Nepal, is particularly worrying, as it is much higher than the globally expected biological SRB of 105 to 100.

This is much more pronounced in Karnali, Sudurpaschim and Madhes Provinces which suffer from historical neglect. Despite a rise in female literacy, patriarchy is still deeply entrenched and the provinces are behind the rest of the country for gender equality, education, healthcare, nutrition and economic opportunities.

“Karnali is resource-rich, especially hydropower and the recent discovery of the methane gas, but inequality is much greater,” says Shahi, who is with the Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Centre (KIRDARC). “Federalism in Nepal is only on paper, we need a total structural reform to devolve political power to really bring about change.”

Despite limited resources, Nepal also suffers from wasteful investment as a result of politically (mis)guided decision-making, instead of people-centric plans and policies, says demographer Gurung. “People are overwhelmingly moving to the cities but our leaders are hell bent on building roads to every village and now there are empty schools in the mountains,” he adds.

Nepal needs data-driven planning but its long-term economic vision 2020-44 seems more of a wish-list than realistic goals,

including average annual GDP growth of 10.5%, \$12,000 per capita income and population under the absolute poverty line at 0.

Other goals include raising electricity generation capacity to 40,000MW, access to motor transport to 99%, life expectancy at birth to 80, maternal mortality down to 20% and literacy to 99% and 100% access to the internet, among others. Meanwhile, Nepal is committed to net-zero by 2045 and 100% renewable energy by 2050.

“Our planners have no idea what kind of infrastructure we need 20, 30 years down the line to sustain and accelerate growth. We need a big structural change in the political leadership, in technocratic planning, and for policy implementation,” says infrastructure expert Surya Raj Acharya.

Meeting such targets would require large investment, and it would be unwise to rely on remittances for the longer run, especially as Nepal’s demographic dividend will diminish as it turns into an aged society by 2065.

Reversing out migration requires a favourable investment climate so jobs are created. Good governance marked by accountability and transparency are the basic prerequisite for ease of doing business. But lack of rule of law and illicit funds put Nepal in the grey list of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global money-laundering watchdog.

“Everything comes down to a political will. The established parties must realise that if they don’t perform, they will be replaced by alternatives,” says Kalpana Khanal. “In the meantime, we must engage the youth and find ways to retain them as well as attract the diaspora to invest in Nepal.”

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Swimming with Sharks

Shark Tank Nepal tv reality show franchise links startups with investors

Vishad Raj Onta

Cabinet Shrestha (pictured extreme left, above) of Agni Group and investor-slash-mentor was listening to a pitch recently from a bead shop owner from Chitwan on Himalaya TV's new hit reality show Shark Tank Nepal.

Shrestha liked what he heard, and offered Sandhya Gaire Poudel of Sandhya Pote House Rs2 million for 35% equity plus profit with an exit after three years.

She had taught herself to make traditional Nepali glass bead necklaces, starting with just Rs5,000 and selling them straight to married women through TikTok. She has trained 5,000 women in necklace making, and with the Rs 2 million investment can expand to take bigger orders all over Nepal.

"So after three years, I give you back 20 lakh?" asked Poudel. Cabinet Shrestha laughed and replied: "20 lakh plus profit, म न ब्यापारी हो नि."

Cabinet Shrestha handles the Mahindra dealership and has his hand in many other businesses. Poudel gleefully accepted the Rs2 million offer, and there was applause from the studio audience.

Shark Tank Nepal, a franchise reality show, was first launched in Japan in 2001 as 'Tigers of Money' and has since been adapted in 54 countries under various names. Entrepreneurs pitch their businesses to a panel of investors, who grill them about the details of their venture before deciding whether or not to extend deals for stakes in the company.

This is the first season with 20 episodes of the show in Nepal,



VEDA / FACEBOOK

each an hour-and-a-half long on Wednesdays and Thursdays on Himalaya TV, and will soon also be streamed on its YouTube Channel.

Besides Shrestha, the four other sharks are (l-r, top picture): Hem Raj Dhakal of IME Group, Ritu Singh Vaidya of VOITH Group, Anand Bagaria of Nimbus, and Saurabh Jyoti of the Padma Jyoti Group of Companies. It is gripping television because the audience does not know which pitch will be successful. It is also educational because it shows what entrepreneurship is all about — all one needs is an idea that flies.

But there is a larger message that Shark Tank Nepal is broadcasting: that not everyone is hell bent on leaving the country.

"It's a step in the right direction, and a breath of fresh air," says Ashutosh Tiwari, an entrepreneurship consultant

himself. "The businesses are all different: their age, caste, gender, ethnicity, where they were born or raised in Nepal, what they studied (or didn't study), and what work they've done."

He continues, "It also shows on national tv the important skill of having to persuade absolute strangers to invest in you. Business plans and advising events is great, but the real help for entrepreneurs comes from the exchange of other people's cold hard cash that they are accountable for."

Social media is also a major player in the show. Not only as a medium to promote Shark Tank, with behind-the-scenes and meet-the-shark type content but also as a place where a lot of the businesses being pitched sell their goods.

Most of the business ideas are related to tech, food and beverage, or clothing and skincare, and many

of the entrepreneurs are women. Some of the more interesting pitches include a dehydrated carrot cake, a completely organic and bio-degradable skincare brand, and a couple who turned interior design careers into a booming furniture business.

One of the biggest deals accepted was Hem Raj Dhakal's decision to invest Rs60 million in the tech company Veda (pictured, left) which started off as a simple notification app facilitating communication between schools and parents, and grew into an international company that provides complete employee resources for schools including payroll and analytics for student performance data.

"I feel that the sharks have learned as much from the pitchers that they have gotten from us," says Shrestha. "We've learned a lot about markets that we have no expertise in. They have gotten us back in touch about how the younger generation is thinking."

Shrestha notes that Nepalis seem to be naturally gifted at tech, and he likes to see how the pitchers have 'localised' or put their own twists on business ideas. The show has received a lot of positive feedback, especially from young Nepalis studying abroad, some of whom may now be thinking of moving back.

Despite its popularity, Shark Tank Nepal took a long time to get sponsors and entrepreneurs. Director Simosh Sunuwar, known for his adventure-based reality show Himalayan Roadies, says: "It was hard to get participants who were afraid that their business ideas would get stolen with Nepal's weak trademark laws. Of the applications we did

receive, many did not meet all the criteria. Some were missing balance sheets..."

Sunuwar says given how busy the Sharks are, it was difficult to find a stretch of time in which they were all free. "Even when we have them, their phones are going off non-stop," he says.

The solution was a fifteen-day stretch that worked for all Sharks, with multiple sets of clothes for continuity. By the end, the Sharks were shooting up to 15 hours a day, hearing up to 13 pitches a day. While all the shooting is done early, post-production editing for clarity and length is still ongoing as the episodes air.

Like all of reality TV, how much of Shark Tank Nepal is scripted? Tiwari thinks that the show feels "slick, a little over scripted at times".

Sunuwar reveals that it is a mix: "As director, I do have to coach the pitchers and the Sharks on how to say certain things, but at the end of the day the Sharks are who they are and they are all very nice and genuine people. My job is to make them comfortable being themselves. They get nervous too."

The Sharks are quick to sniff out iffy businesses, like a skincare brand that was only packaged in Nepal and claimed competitors were misrepresenting ingredients.

The Nepali version of Shark Tank may lack the drama of the US version, and the Sharks do not live up to the ruthless reputation of the sea predator. This means it is a feel-good show that Nepali audiences prefer. When bowing out of deals, the Sharks are exceedingly graceful, often offering other sorts of help such as networking or contacts to soften the 'no'.

OLD MONEY

Two or more Sharks often go in together on joint deals, maybe because there are only so many 'shark-level' entrepreneurs in Nepal. The funniest parts of the show are when Sharks talk 'candidly' in between pitches. But more shark-like Sharks would give the show a more dramatic feel.

In one case, the Sharks agree to fund a business that repackages sanitary pads for 'CSR' purposes, which betrays the premise of the show. Some of the criticism online about the choice of Sharks is that besides Hem Raj Dhakal, they all come from old money families, and had considerable head starts in life and business.

"But you can't fault this right now," says Tiwari, "there are very few self-made successful entrepreneurs in Nepal, and trading is a legitimate business that has made multimillionaires in the alcohol business in the US, for example."

The friendlier Sharks do make for more deals, though. In the first season, investment from the Sharks totaled Rs400 million, in contrast to Rs420 million in the Indian version of the show and Rs170 million for the Bangladesh version.

While the show is pioneering, Tiwari notes that it is more glamorous, and glosses over the gritty parts of business in Nepal. "The reality is that there is a government, and a registrar that you have to visit every year. There are rental taxes, penalties, and fines. Businesses don't get immediate payments, and are often only profitable on paper, which makes it very difficult for them to operate. The investment that they get from the Sharks will give them some working capital, some oxygen."

Director Sunuwar is grateful for the reception: "It's great that viewers have welcomed Shark Tank, and I hope it will encourage young entrepreneurs. We're already getting applications for the next season, and I am excited to make it better, perhaps with different sharks." 📺



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IN GOOD FAITH:

The lesser-worshipped Hanuman Bhairav at Bhaktapur Darbar Square retains much of its original form (right), whereas idols of a sacred bull and the Shivalinga of Bishwamitreswor in the Pashupati area have been completely eroded by daily worship (below).

A devotee worships an idol of Hanuman at Patan Darbar Square (far, right).

Offerings corrode Kathmandu's gods

Sacred idols are defaced by vermilion, chemical-based dyes, and centuries of contact

Anita Bhetwal



The Golden Gate in Bhaktapur Darbar Square is dedicated to Taleju, the ancestral goddess of the Malla kings. The temple was built 271 years ago during the reign of Ranjit Malla, and serves as the entryway to the inner courtyard of the palace.

The frame of the gilded copper pagoda-style gateway carries intricately carved deities that glint in the sunlight as thousands of visitors run their hands through the structure on their way into the World Heritage Site.

Among them are the much-revered statues of Bhairab on the left of the gate and goddess Bhagwati on the right. But where their foreheads should be are two gaping holes, corroded by abrasion and chemical dyes devotees have smeared on the statues over the centuries.

Whereas previously, most offerings were vegetable-based dyes, these are being replaced with brightly coloured chemicals that

corrode the stone and bronze of the idols.

Chemical dyes have also eroded idols in Bhaktapur Darbar, and damaged stone inscriptions at their pedestals. Historian Purushottam Lochan Shrestha says: "It is interesting that idols and statues that are not worshipped as much have remained intact."

Examples are the Hanuman Bhairav and Narasimha stone idols that flank the entrance to Bhaktapur's National Art Museum. The inscriptions at their base say both statues were commissioned by King Bhupatindra Malla in 1689 and placed at the entry in the belief that they would ward off disease and disaster, and grant victory in battles with enemy states.

Today, the inscription on the lesser-worshipped Hanuman Bhairav retains much of its original form. But the etchings on the Narasimha — revered as the god who protects people from calamity and epidemics — have crumbled

because of continuous contact over the decades.

"The idols we have are sacred and rare, we will never create statues like these again. So, it is crucial that we stop touching and using chemical offerings in ways that damage them," adds Shrestha. "We need to change our behaviour and express our faith with our hearts, not with our hands. What good does it do to light lamps that burn the faces of our gods?"

While much of the focus in Nepal has rightly been on the repatriation of stolen artefacts, images and idols being worshipped at home face rapid deterioration in other ways. It is not just idols, historians are also finding it difficult to decipher inscriptions on stones which contain vital cultural, socio-economic and linguistic documentation because they have been smeared with offerings for so long.

An 11th century stone engraving in Bhaktapur Darbar Square that

dates back to the Nirbhaya Dev has worn away because it was used as a stepping stone to draw water from a nearby well. The historically significant inscription documents the king gifting Aradhya Dev some land, and identifies Bhaktapur as श्री खोपु.

In Pashupati, one of the four holiest sites in Hinduism, near the temple's western gate is a Shivalinga of Bishwamitreswor holding a rudraksha necklace in one hand and a kamandalu on the other which have been completely eroded by daily worship, while more inaccessible idols are intact.

Sushil Kumar Gautam, archaeological officer at the Pashupati Area Development Trust, told us that the statue's features were clearly distinguishable until 50 years ago, but the accoutrements in Bishwamitreshwar's hands are now just bare stumps.

"The deterioration of the shivalinga is quite recent, perhaps due to the increasing use of

chemical-laden dyes and incense lamps," Gautam told us.

Another sixth-century statue of a bull located in the courtyard of Pashupati remains intact because the public has been prohibited from touching the antiquity for the past 20 years.

The nearby Bankali temple houses a Lichchhavi-era statue of the goddess, armed with a sword and dancing over the prone form of the deity Betal. The stone idol is painted in hues of yellows and purples, and the inscription on the base of the idol has faded, rendering the words unreadable. Luckily, the original text and translation of the valuable inscription was recorded in 1973 by historian Dhana Bajra Bajracharya in his book *Licchavi Kaal ka Abhilekh*.

Other religious artefacts around the Chabahil and Jayabageshwari area are similarly buried underneath the weight of daily religious offerings of vermilion, flowers, fruits, sweets.



PHOTOS: AJAY HAKAJU

“We have been called anti-religion when we pointed out that the dyes and offerings have damaged our idols,” says Gautam. “Devotees should be made more aware of the damage they inflict on the gods and goddesses they worship.”

Many artefacts have been damaged so badly that they have had to be replaced multiple times, like the 16th century copper idol of a prone Betal on the main gate of the Maitidevi temple. The idol was replaced with a new one six months ago after constant contact with offerings corroded its mouth, forehead, and feet, says temple priest Tirtha Jyoti Bajracharya.

Burning of incense inside the temple was banned as the statues were coated in thick layers of corrosive soot. He says: “We cannot tell people not to worship, but we have to do what we can to preserve our gods. Some devotees understand us, others do not.”

Chemist Rajesh Prasad Singh of the Department of Archaeology confirms that offerings are the primary reason for the deterioration of religious artefacts. Vermilion is made from a mineral called cinnabar (mercury sulphide) and synthetic saffron corrodes stone and metal. Chemicals in processed milk and sweets offered to deities also damage the faces of idols,

while oil from lamps contributes to discolouration.

“There is also natural weathering at work, but most of the damage is from touching or materials used for worship,” adds Singh.

Cultural expert Govinda Tandon agrees that deterioration of Nepal’s religious artefacts has accelerated in recent years because traditional organic dyes have been replaced with chemicals. Vermilion used to be made by mixing dried red sandalwood with pomegranate, rose, and rhododendron flowers, while henna, pine leaves or spinach were combined to make green dyes. Yellow was extracted from

dried turmeric, and purple from beetroot.

Coloured powders available in the market, which are used for festivals like Tihar and Holi, are also toxic to humans because they contain compounds of lead (Pb), chromium (Cr), cadmium (Cd) and even mercury (Hg).

The Nepal government in 2015 set the maximum amount of lead allowed in colours and paints at 90 ppm (parts per million). But a 2021 study into 62 enamel paints currently sold in Nepal found that at least 30 contained more than the prescribed amount of lead.

DISTANCE WORSHIP

Meanwhile, the application of chemical-based paints and enamels on centuries-old woodcarvings across the city’s temples have also caused many to splinter.

“Most wood carvings are so damaged that we can no longer restore them,” says Singh. In India authorities have designated alternative places of worship, only allowing visitors to observe the world heritage sites from a distance.

Saubhagya Pradhananga, Director General of the Department of Archaeology, worships regularly at the feet of the reclining Vishnu at Budhanilkantha. Vermilion powder is no longer allowed on the main statue, and devotees have to worship from afar.

“What we can do is ban chemical-based worship material, and create separate spaces for religious offerings,” she says. “For this we need extensive public awareness efforts. Besides temples and idols we also have the intangible heritage of ritual worship linked to our faith, so completely stopping this practice is neither possible, nor the appropriate solution.”




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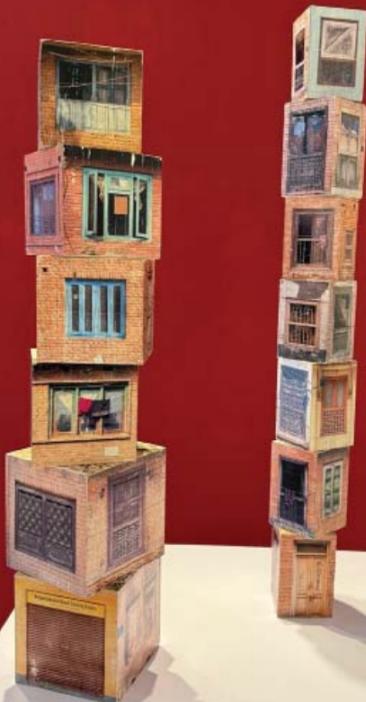

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FROM THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

A mixed media exhibition are windows on a tangible, architectural archive of Patan



Star Ross

Georgia O'Keefe, a foundational modernist painter most known for her floral and landscape paintings once said: "One can't paint New York as it is, but rather as it is felt."

O'Keefe's residency in the city occurred during its extreme architectural expansion. Her lesser known body of work is entitled 'My New Yorks' and the series of paintings are a bird's eye perspective of New York City.

The ongoing exhibition 'Under the Same Roof' at Siddhartha Art Gallery by Subodh Bhandari and

Sambridhi Ratna Shukya resembles O'Keefe's 'love letters to New York'.

Bhandari, a Patan newcomer and Shukya, a Patan native, work together to honour their architectural surroundings using mixed media. 'A Walk Through the City' is a conglomeration of miniature window replicas.

The duo took snapshots of

The fabric of society

An artist's ode to the Dolpo way of life through texture, jewelry, plants

Vishad Raj Onta

Duthik: Stories from Dolpo at The Kala Salon is Chering Gyao Gurung's ode to his homeland of Dolpo using its native textiles and jewelry. It is also an urgent call to preserve the region's culture, eroded by encroaching modernity, migration, and a changing climate.

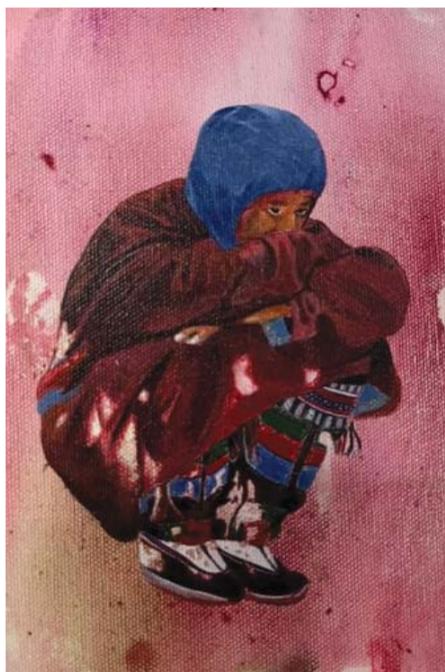
"I have always loved the textiles of my home, and these, along with the lapis, coral and other minerals used in our jewelry, have inspired my art," writes Gurung in his artist's statement.

The famous Dolpo blankets, weighty, richly coloured with linear patterns, hang alongside his paintings in the Salon, on the top floor of the Chhaya Centre in Thamel. One of the blankets is his grandmother's. "It almost still smells smoky, since we only use firewood," says the soft-spoken 25-year-old.

Dolpo in the trans-Himalaya is to the north of the Dhaulagiri range. Most people, including the artist's family are pastoralists, herding 100 yaks, goats and sheep. Many families also collect yarsagumba, and at one point that would make enough money to last the year, but not anymore.

"From Dolpo, it is pretty unheard of to pursue art," says Gurung, who is not traditionally trained in thangka like other Himalayan artists Tsherin Sherpa or Dorjee Karmarong. But his passion for art showed early, when he came to Kathmandu at five to study.

"In Dolpo, we used to go to school for six months and work with our parents for six months. An aunt suggested that I might as well get some tuition during this time off. Once I came to Kathmandu, we found French sponsors and I stayed here to study," recounts Gurung.



Gurung lived in a hostel and studied under that sponsorship until grade ten. He got support from home for further studies for a bachelor's in art, which he only finished two years ago. In the meantime, for him, art was a hobby he was good at, he would often win at competitions that this school took him to.

Following graduation, many of Gurung's peers did a lot of commission work and got burned out, while he received residencies, allowing him to stick to his own process and ideas, subsequently developing a style and a voice of his own.

Gurung was the first of his family to move to Kathmandu like he did, and while that has led to a blossoming art career, he is wistful

about the life he left behind. "The people there lived sort of a perfect life in the village," he says, even as it is clear herding yaks would not have been enough for his independent spirit.

And migration is a big theme in his work, six of the paintings at the exhibition are named as much. Two of them show a mother walking with a baby on her back, and one depicts a snow leopard on the move with its cub.

"People migrate in generations, and because of this, they lose culture," notes Gurung. Three others under the theme are spirals of clothes and masks, seemingly saying that migration causes deep changes in, and confusions about, one's identity.

The fabric of Dolpo and the outfits are prominently featured in almost every painting. "The women, in particular, are complete in how they dress up," says Gurung. His women wear bhakkus and belts, and blankets and a complete set of necklaces and jewelry. An important detail is the vajra, traditionally a powerful Buddhist and Hindu mythical object and weapon, that the women use as a clip to hold the hems of their shawl together.

"Note how the colours of the fabric are dull," points out Gurung, explaining that these cloths are dyed naturally with 'stone' colours but fade quickly in the sun and the dust storms of Dolpo.

To Gurung, the fabrics signify the Dolpo culture that he is so fond of, but disappearing. He laments that people would rather buy similar but cheaper blankets from Kathmandu or Tibet, and are abandoning traditional

occupations, instead running hotels.

"His feeling for Dolpo really shines through, and makes the paintings feel very warm," says curator Sophia Pande. "I think the exhibition shows the unique style Chering has developed, and his range."

Another Dolpo detail that features heavily is bhoj patra, or birch bark paper which is used to write on as well as roofing material, given that it is waterproof. The sap of the birch tree is so sweet that it is also tapped and boiled for sugar. "People also carry it on yarchagumba trips, to use as light plates or cups. They can be washed and reused too," adds Gurung.

Like the Dolpo blankets, reams of this bhoj patra and a bowlful of yarcha are also displayed and give a nuanced understanding of the Dolpo way of life.

Gurung also has a series of paintings on the bark paper, the first of which is a sky blue 'DHARMA MASK' or 'MUKUT'. "I mixed acrylic paint with glue and diluted it to use like watercolour on the bhoj patra, and I was very happy with how it turned out," he explains of the piece.

Gurung works out of White Yak studio in Lalitpur, a name he chose for the rare and revered version of the animal. "I plan to carry on with this subject matter as I haven't exhausted all my ideas," he says, "and I can still get better with my colouring." 🇳🇵

*Duthik: Stories from Dolpo
By Chering Gyao Gurung
The Kala Salon
Chhaya Centre, Thamel
11am-8pm
Until 1 August*





rapidly changing communities, and both styles are similar in their directness. The two artists reconstruct observations through stylistic fabrication, and capture the sensation of traversing a street, suddenly making ordinary objects artistic.

'Under the Same Roof' centres around Patan's doors, powerlines,

and most notably windows. The two artists roamed alleyways looking for features that pique their interest, committing them to memory with photography.

Bhandari and Shakya do not allow the objects to go unnoticed, forever examining details which others frequently overlook. For the artists, rendering everyday

entities creates unification through relatability. Their overall message focuses on coexistence and interconnectedness: how easily accessible, recurring items, visible to all, establish familiarity and speak volumes via silence.

The artists inject bits of lived experiences into their reproductions, concealing personal artefacts such as bed sheets or posters within windows. They place humanity upon inanimate objects, allowing for exploration of a unified history.

Each window represents a personal memory rather than something imagined, as they are constructed from photographs the artists themselves took. Walking into the gallery feels as if you are entering a collective memory. The approximately 500 wooden windows, with photo transfer and acrylic details, engulf the first floor.

The incredible amount of small windows establish an immersive experience, prompting the viewer to question, whose homes are

attached, what type of people have lived there and for how long? The diversity of each piece astounds the eye. With so much repetition, how can the individual elements be entirely unique?

NEW VS NATIVE

Windows are a common occurrence, present in any building. Viewing this commonality clustered together reveals the personal rather than architectural elements which make them individualistic.

Their Patan studio is on the second floor of a residential building with a blindingly mint green room, dusty from the drills and grinders used for constructing and polishing sculptures.

Bhandari says he has always yearned for an artistic lifestyle, whereas Shakya picked up a knack for it after a classroom quarrel regarding his artistic abilities at Kathmandu University where both had the same motivation to capture their surroundings.

The two differ in being native

and new to the Patan area. So, is this exhibition about new vs native? Bhandari replied: "The idea of new vs native is no more about new vs native, it's more about new and native, both the things coexisting together."

This is a metaphorical representation of their windows: what can you know about someone from outside appearances? Each window represents a specific period in time, whether it was constructed yesterday or 20 years ago, whether it houses a young family or one which has lived there for generations.

The message is to understand how these elements help us coexist, by placing these varying periods of life centimetres apart from each other. It creates a space in which being surrounded by others is inevitable regardless of differences. 🇳🇵

Star Ross is an undergraduate at Princeton University studying Medical Anthropology alongside Visual Arts and Climate Science.

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Events



Kids Day

Let your kids make the most out of their creativity and fun with arts and crafts, face painting, and a special Make Your Own Sandwich session with chefs
26 July, 12pm-3pm, Fee: Rs1,000, Hard Rock Cafe, Sherpa Mall

The List

The List is a one-woman act about love, loss, and care, featuring Alisha Bade Shrestha. Directed by Anurag Upadhyaya, this play on an urbanite's life in a quiet country will keep the audience on their toes.
30 July, 6:30pm onwards, Ticket: Rs850, Moksh Bar, Jhamsikhel



Kagtali

Kagtali, penned and directed by Nabin Chandra Aryal, delves into a haunting episode in an affluent household and the hidden truths it sets in motion. Check Facebook for show timing.
Till 16 August, Ticket: Rs500, Kausi Theatre, Teku

Mixed media exhibit

Subodh Bhandari and Sambridhi Ratna Shakya explore coexistence and interconnectedness in their architectural surroundings using mixed media in this visually striking exhibition.
Till 16 August, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited

Duthik

Chering Gurung's solo exhibition brings tales from his homeland, Dolpo, to life through vivid, expressive canvases. Don't miss the chance to witness this striking body of work.
Till 1 August, 11am-8pm, The Kala Salon, Chhaya Center Mall, Thamel



Music

Funk & Disco

What The Funk will be on stage for an electrifying evening filled with nostalgic funk vibes that'll have you dancing all night.
25 July, 7pm onwards, Ticket: 500, Moksh, Jhamsikhel

The Elements

Nepali experimental pop trio The Elements is bringing their unique indie sound to Lavie to mark the restaurant's five-year anniversary.
27 July, 5pm onwards, Ticket: Rs1,000, Lavie Garden, Boudha



Serenade Sessions

Serenade brings soul-stirring sound with a music-filled evening featuring Prabesh K. Shrestha and the Band. Salil and the Space Monster will open to kick off the night.
25 July, 6pm onwards, Ticket: Rs1,000, EDEN Sanepa

Phatcowlee

Immerse yourself in Phatcowlee's sonic universe, where folk rhythms blend with original lyrics. Entry is free.
25 July, 8pm onwards, Beers N' Cheers



Naren Limbu

Join in for a memorable night of music at XO with a powerful live performance by Naren Limbu, alongside an exclusive music video premiere by Aastha Band.
25 July, 9pm onwards, Ticket: Rs1,500, XO Club, Thamel



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Nagarkot (01) 6680080



Dining

Octave

Octave offers delectable Japanese and intercontinental dishes, including Salmon Sushi and Octave MoMo Platter. Enjoy live music, karaoke sessions, and panoramic views of the city from their space.
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Dine @ Aloft

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Sanepa, 9808032923

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A vibrant eatery offering meals from breakfast to dinner. Try their comforting cappuccino with almond milk or the vegan pizza.
Thamel, 9808790813



Silk

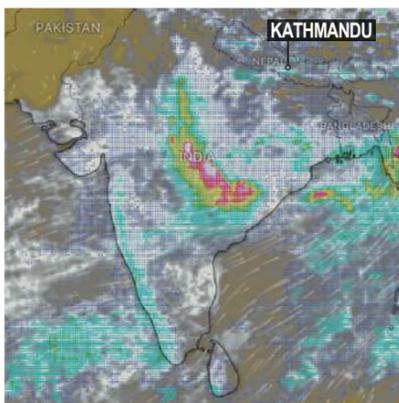
Silk Artisanal Creamery offers handcrafted ice cream made with the finest ingredients and no artificial flavours. Explore their extensive ice-cream menu, including pistachio, dark chocolate, pineapple coconut, and mango.
Lazimpat, 9861444776

Miss Moti Escapes

Kripa Joshi

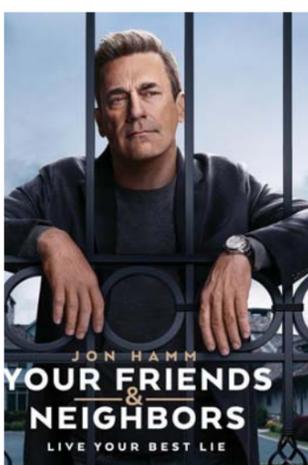


Weekend Weather



Hot and Humid

This monsoon is getting a bit erratic. Drought in the eastern plains is still quite severe, the monsoon pulse this week brought clouds but it did not precipitate much. Even in Kathmandu Valley, we only got about 15mm the whole week. Friday and part of Saturday are going to be hot and humid. The temperature will reach 30°C, but it will feel like 35°C in the afternoon. But by Sunday, the rains should pick up again into next week.



Our Pick

The 2025 American dark comedy crime drama series *Your Friends & Neighbors* follows hedge fund manager Andrew "Coop" Cooper, whose life comes to a standstill when he is fired from his job. Still reeling from wife's affair that led to the end of his marriage, and now facing unemployment, Coop becomes bitter towards everyone whom he thinks has contributed to his misfortune. He then resorts to stealing from his wealthy community so that he can continue to maintain his lavish lifestyle. Stars Jon Hamm, Amanda Peet, Olivia Munn, Mark Tallman, Hoon Lee, Lena Hall, and Aimee Carrero.

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- अपरिचित व्यक्तिलाई जथाभावी साथी बन्न अनुरोध नपठाऔं ।
- सामाजिक सञ्जाल तथा अन्य विद्युतीय माध्यमबाट चिह्न पुरस्कार जस्ता आर्थिक प्रलोभनका प्रस्तावको भरमा नपरौं ।
- आफूले प्रवाह गरेका सन्देश वा सूचनाबाट समाजमा पर्नसक्ने नकारात्मक प्रभावको ख्याल गरौं ।
- आफ्नो सन्देशले कुनै व्यक्ति वा अन्य कुनै समुदायको आत्मसम्मानमा चोट नपुऱ्याऔं ।



नेपाल सरकार
विज्ञापन बोर्ड

An ode to the ordinary

Ten artists incorporate the familiar and the everyday into fine art

Sangya Lamsal

Seldom do we see the smaller things, read between the lines, and realise that the little, fleeting moments are what shape our realities.

As we trace the light & dust, Haru Art Collective's first group exhibition at Dalai-la Art Space, revisits the value of these moments. Through the works of ten artists, the exhibition details our everyday, ordinary lives, making viewers relate, reflect, and bask in nostalgia.

One such piece is Moulik Limbu's *यादहरु सपना जस्तो लाग्छ* (pictured), a dreamy blue landscape rendered in watercolor and gouache where birds and animals emerge subtly through still, royal-azure leaves.

As a child, Limbu would stay up late with his brother, imagining fantastical creatures from the shadows outside their window, but at dawn, they would discover they were just leaves. Those quiet nights formed lasting memories that continue to tug at Limbu's heart, which he now preserves in his art.

Nischal Gurung's *Familiar Echoes* captures the soft emotions of togetherness. Whether it is a person or familiar household objects we often overlook, they stay with us. In *काका र केन्ट*, the warmth of huddling together for a meal is carefully portrayed, highlighting how closeness often unfolds in the most mundane of moments.

In another piece, Anil Nepali's work explores the haziness of



distant memories. What seems like a normal painting from afar becomes increasingly blurred up close. This visual metaphor mirrors Nepali's own experience of fading recollections from home reconstructed with pixelated squares and muted monochrome. The result is a reflection on the fragile, fading nature of memory.

Viewers will see the attempt to reconnect with ancestral roots and traditional practices. The *Arrival of Bun-Dyo* by Kabir Kayastha

depicts the rain god Bunga Dyo during the Rato Maytsendranath Jatra. Meanwhile, Shrayam Shakya explores his lineage's deep connection with land and water in his piece, *From the Ground* (pictured, right).

"The oral traditions and stories of my ancestors become the remnants of the land and the knowledge that existed," he tells us. At the centre of his exploration is the Yaksha – a nature spirit that embodies land and governs the

essence of water. For Shakya, the Yaksha is not just a mythological being but also a symbol of ancestry.

Terracotta, the material he uses, reinforces this rootedness. "It is used in the architecture of hills and is connected to the land, so it carries the essence of the theme." As oral histories and traditions continue to fade, Shakya believes art becomes a vital archive.

ABSENCE AND PRESENCE

Jyotsna Udas explores themes of femininity in her work. She says, "In my work, I embroider objects tied to femininity – those that adorn, restrain, and define."

Using delicate strands of her own and her family's hair, she weaves silent but powerful stories of inherited expectations, unspoken rules, and the confined spaces women are told to occupy -- a quiet testament to the strength and complexity of feminine energy.

"I cut my hair short every once in a while. It makes me feel free, free from all the burdens, but I get scolded by people at home when I do, or when I dye it," she tells us. "Long hair is still seen as the beauty standard. Hair colour is taboo. People stare. Women become self-conscious. And when people can judge just based on something as personal as hair, it makes me wonder – how much more do we have to hear in life?"

Sadishree Thapa's *A Room that Waits* explores the subtle yet profound difference in a house that comes with the presence and absence of a person. When the person is there, it feels like home,



otherwise, it is hollow. 'A room waits, for the warmth of a presence, for the sound that you said were home,' reads the artist's profound accompanying note.

Places Where Dust Settles by Preeti Duwal captures the quiet beauty of everyday household objects, how they gather dust and the silent stories. Rojan Ghimire explores offerings and the subtle traces of life and birth, while Raunak Karanjit's cyanotype work reflects on memory, identity, and the fading presence of a once-familiar marigold.

The artists weave together objects, places, life, and memory, into layered stories shaped by our daily rhythms and reflections, and transform the familiar into the extraordinary. 🇳🇵

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LOVE THY NEIGHBOURS:

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Prime Minister K P Oli during a visit to Janakpur in 2018 (right).

Less than a year later, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Nepal, the first by a Chinese head of state in 23 years (right, below).

Sudiksha Tuladhar

Described by its founding king 260 years ago as a “yam between two boulders” pressed on both sides by the Chinese Empire and British India, the metaphor has metamorphosed in the new geopolitical reality that Nepal faces.

The gradual withdrawal of a distracted West, the rise of India and China, and emerging power of the Gulf states is also changing Nepal’s foreign policy outlook, and forcing it to reimagine its place in a multilateral world.

After Donald Trump became president for the second time this year, geopolitics is going through a tectonic shift. Washington’s relations with New Delhi have recently become strained after Trump took credit for the ceasefire between India and Pakistan in May, and Trump dining with Pakistan Army chief Asim Munir at the White House. Then, Trump threatened to impose an extra tariff on 10 members of the BRICS bloc, which includes India.

“Recent developments between India and the US are a result of President Trump’s reactive approach that did not meet Indian prime minister Modi’s expectations,” explains international relations expert Prakash Bhandari.

If this pushes India closer to China, it may tip Kathmandu’s precarious balancing act between Beijing and New Delhi. Although Nepal has not suffered punitive US trade tariffs like other Asian countries, the closure of USAID projects and imminent mass deportation of Nepali TPS migrants will have far-reaching consequences.

“There are multiple global crises happening at the same time. Any attempt to change Nepal’s non-aligned principle during this complicated phase of world politics will push us into a deep quagmire,” warns foreign policy expert Nishchal Nath Pandey.

Shifting geopolitics could force Nepal to review its policy of neutrality and equidistance between its two giant neighbours to pursue a more pragmatic economic diplomacy that focuses on foreign investment, trade, tourism, and labour export.

Experts have often joked that Nepal is not “landlocked but India-locked” since trans-Himalayan connectivity is much more difficult than the open border to the south. This has historically made Nepal more economically and politically dependent on India.

“Whether like it or not, we are likely to lean more towards India,” says Santosh Sharma Poudel from Nepal Institute for Policy Research. “Even Chinese leaders have told Nepal’s rulers to maintain friendly relations with India.”

This may therefore be the time for Nepal to look beyond the ‘two boulders’ to promote foreign direct investment from countries like Japan, Korea, the Gulf states and Europe. Besides serving as a destination for Nepali migrants, countries like Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Oman have untapped investment and tourism opportunities.

“Sectors such as hydropower and trade have immense investment potential from countries beyond our neighbours,” says Poudel.



RSS

Looking beyond two boulders

Nepal cannot choose its neighbours but there is a whole other multilateral world out there



NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVE

Even so, the geopolitical reality is that India and China will always loom large. India has barely tolerated increased Chinese presence in Nepal’s hydropower and infrastructure, refusing to buy electricity and allow flights from projects with Chinese involvement.

Nepal has felt squeezed by the two neighbours both when their relations are strained after border skirmishes, or when their relations are good.

India’s post-earthquake blockade in 2015 still rankles. Nepalis remember that China did not support their claim to the Limpiyadhura region, and that Beijing retroactively announced that Pokhara airport was under its Belt Road Initiative (BRI) even though

Nepal took a hefty loan for it.

The Sino-US Cold War has also affected Nepal with the orchestrated opposition in 2021 to the \$500 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) project to upgrade transmission lines and highways. After Trump, the MCC faced uncertainty but it has been continued possibly because it is seen in Washington as a counter to China’s BRI in Nepal.

The lesson is that Nepal cannot expect magnanimity or charity from its big neighbours, or the United States. Every country is looking out for its own national interest, and so should Nepal by asserting its independence and improving its governance to develop the economy.

“India has its own place and China has its own place in terms of their relations with Nepal,” says Indra Adhikari from Policy Research Institute. “But it is true that Nepal has not been able to leverage its relations with both neighbours.”

This does not mean playing New Delhi off against Beijing, but to get both powers to be twin locomotives pulling Nepal’s economy in the same direction. What Nepal definitely cannot afford is to have the two engines tugging the country in opposite directions.

Adhikari adds, “It is natural that each country sees its own interest while investing in Nepal. We should be able to establish an environment of trust for countries

which want to invest.”

With Nepal on the pathway to transitioning from a Least Developed Country to a Developing Country by November 2026, it will have to plan for loss of foreign aid and higher interest rates on loans from international agencies. This means greater emphasis on improving the foreign investment climate to create domestic jobs and boost the economy.

This requires a change in the mindset of Nepal’s politicians to understand the transformed geopolitical reality, and strategise accordingly. But, says Nishchal Nath Pandey: “We have changed our political system often, but our geography has not changed.”



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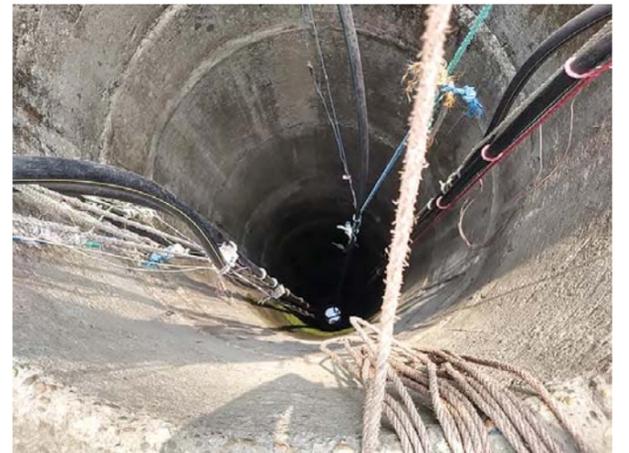


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Tarai districts gasp for water

The failure of this year's monsoon in the Madhes is not just a problem for Madhes Province, but for Nepal



ALL PHOTOS: CHANDRAKISHORE



Borderlands
Chandrakishore

Droughts are not uncommon in Nepal. In 1983, the monsoon failed and international food aid had to be parachuted into western Nepal to avert famine. The Tarai has long suffered from too much water or too little.

This year it is too little. The monsoon arrived ahead of schedule on 1 June, but since then there has been only 20% of the normal precipitation in the eastern Tarai, and only one-third of paddy fields have been planted.

On Wednesday, the Cabinet decided to declare Madhes Province a 'disaster-hit zone', and Prime Minister K P Oli told Parliament that the Nepal Army could be deployed if necessary to alleviate the water shortage. But government response could be limited since this is a crisis that took years to build up.

Politicians have blamed climate breakdown, but the reality is more complicated. Denudation of the fragile Chure Hills, river-bed mining for boulders and sand, and over-extraction of ground water on both sides of the border are more important factors. Climate change

has just made the human-induced causes worse.

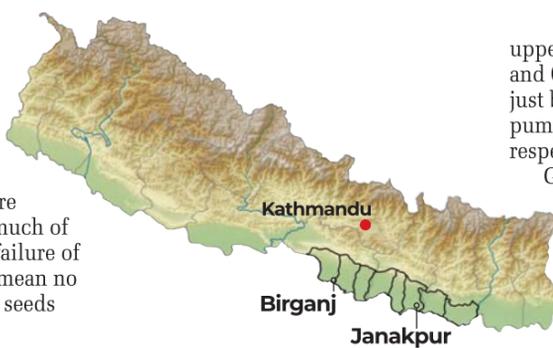
The farmers of the Madhes are used to "gambling with the monsoon". Precious paddy seedlings are transplanted, but since so much of the agriculture is rain-fed, failure of the monsoon does not just mean no harvest, but also the loss of seeds that could have been eaten.

Monsoons used to be like clockwork, vegetation in the highlands to the north controlled floods and recharged groundwater, population density and intensive agriculture in India and Nepal had not yet happened. The rains were something to celebrate.

Although farmers here remember monsoon failures before, this year's drought is happening after many years. And it is not just no rain, ponds and water pumps have gone dry, even deep tubewells provide limited water. Cities like Birganj and Janakpur are badly hit.

The eight Madhes districts have the highest outmigration rates in Nepal, crop failure and lack of water is surely going to add to the push factor this year. If this is the situation during the monsoon, many wonder what it will be like in the dry season.

It is said that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Politicians do not have a magic wand to solve this crisis – it is the result of past mistakes and poor planning. The prime minister



said on Wednesday that deep tube wells would be drilled to pump water, but this could exacerbate the problem by lowering the groundwater table even further.

In the past month, the people of the borderlands are wondering what went wrong. There is not much they can do about global climate breakdown, but a responsive federal or provincial government could take measures to address the immediate crisis and launch mid- and long-term mitigation plans.

The Madhes water crisis has exposed the historical inattention and neglect of the federal government. That is nothing new, Kathmandu has always disregarded the plains. Wards, municipalities and cities of the Tarai have had to deal with it on their own, in many places fire brigade tankers have been deployed to ferry drinking water.

Some of the reasons for the water emergency here is what has been allowed to happen in the

upper catchment in the Mahabharat and Chure. Wells are going dry not just because of farms in Nepal over-pumping – groundwater does not respect national boundaries.

Geographically, the plains, hills and mountains may look different but they are part of the same ecosystem, the same river basins. The Himalayan eco-biological domain is not only mountains, it includes the plains.

There are also interventions that can be done at the local level. Wetlands, marshes and ponds that used to store monsoon water and recharge the aquifers have been built over in the past decades due to urban expansion.

Traditional water conservation practices, some of which were carried over since 1990 with Village Development Committees, have been abandoned due to urban pressure, settlements along the highways and the almost complete disappearance of the dense jungle that used to cover the northern edges of the eight districts. The Tarai now has 53% of Nepal's population, with Madhes Province alone having 6.5 million people.

Private water tanker companies are doing a roaring business. But the water they distribute is neither clean nor cheap. It is enough only for household use, not for agriculture.

The Tarai used to be Nepal's rice bowl, producing surplus grain

to feed the whole country. The soil has been poisoned by chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and now there is no water. Loss of forest in the Chure slopes has also brought down sand and reduced the fertility of the soil.

There is no reason the Tarai should suffer such a severe water shortage just because the rains fail. There is plenty of water flowing down snowfed Himalayan rivers that can be channeled for agriculture with schemes like the Marin-Kamala Diversion.

What has to be understood is that this severe drought in the Madhes is not just the problem of Madhes Province, it is a problem for Nepal. It is an opportunity for Kathmandu to show that it cares for the people of the Tarai, and take steps to address the crisis before public outrage in the plains boils over again.

Unless this crisis is tackled on an emergency footing, there is a danger of mass out migration due to the lack of water. Let's set aside climate breakdown for now, let us tackle the man-made causes first.

The federal government declaring Madhes Province a disaster zone is a glimmer of hope, but the people sweltering in the desiccated plains are waiting for that pronouncement to be followed by action. 🇳🇵

Chandrakishore is a Birganj-based political commentator who writes this monthly column BORDERLINES in Nepali Times. @kishore_chandra

All eyes on COP30 in Belém

The November summit must ensure pragmatic pathways to deliver on past climate commitments.

Jacinda Ardern, Carlos Lopes, and Laurence Tubiana

In 2015, the landmark Paris climate agreement set the ambitious but necessary goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, and ensuring that the increase stays “well below” 2°C. Average global surface temperature has already reached 1.1°C above the twentieth-century baseline. Time is running out to reach this goal.

At last month’s 62nd session of the United Nations Climate Change Subsidiary Bodies (SB62) in Bonn (pictured, right) – the negotiations for November’s UN Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Belém – little progress was made.

Building consensus is thus a key challenge facing Brazil’s COP30 presidency. The task ahead is formidable because four interconnected developments are impeding multilateral cooperation.

First, the global-governance architecture, with the UN at its core, is in disarray. Reform efforts are gridlocked, and the UN risks losing its relevance and credibility.

Second, the rise of transactional diplomacy has meant countries prioritise their own short-term interests over collective long-term needs. This approach precludes broad-based cooperation, as it erodes the norms that have traditionally



IISD/ENB

underpinned international engagement.

Third, compromise is being rejected in favour of ‘realism’, leading to extreme polarisation and entrenched negotiating positions. Multilateral negotiations regularly come down to the wire, and the results are often disappointing, further encouraging transactional engagement at the expense of cooperation and compromise.

Finally, climate change is increasingly taking a back seat to other challenges, with armed conflicts, a global trade slowdown, intensifying growth headwinds, and record debt levels consuming political attention, diplomatic space, and financial resources.

Brazil clearly has its work cut

out for it. Above all, it must resist the tendency for COP presidencies to emphasise fresh agreements and ambitious commitments – the kind that grab headlines and make negotiations look like a smashing success but often fall short.

Brazil’s COP30 presidency must eschew flashy results in favour of pragmatic pathways to deliver on past commitments.

Brazil’s Fourth Letter to the International Community outlines an Action Agenda to make progress on what the world has already collectively agreed in previous COPs. The Agenda seeks to leverage existing initiatives to implement the first ‘global stocktake’ under the Paris agreement.

This focus on previously agreed outcomes is well-suited to the current geopolitical context, in which any agreement can be difficult to reach. Representatives at the SB62 in Bonn did not achieve a consensus, and last month’s G7 summit failed to deliver a joint communiqué. Rather than perpetuating stalemate, the Action Agenda invites stakeholders to make progress where agreement already exists.

The Agenda also charts the way forward. It is organised into six thematic ‘axes’, including stewarding forests, oceans, and biodiversity; transforming agriculture and food systems, and building resilience for cities, infrastructure, and

water. ‘Unleashing enablers and accelerators’ in finance, technology, and capacity-building will accelerate implementation at scale.

Since responsibility for the implementation and governance of climate policy is distributed among many actors which must have some level of trust that others are doing their part, the Agenda also establishes ‘transparency, monitoring, and accountability’ as top priorities.

AGENDA FOR ACTION

To this end, Brazil’s COP30 presidency should seek to deliver a set of shared principles and supportive mechanisms.

As COP30 Special Envoys, we extend our full support to the Action Agenda. By emphasising consolidation, rather than spectacle, Brazil is setting the stage for a highly productive COP30, one focused on bridging divides, building trust, and delivering genuine progress. The task ahead is daunting, but the chance to rebuild momentum is real.

This commentary is signed by Adnan Amin, CEO of COP28; Arunabha Ghosh, CEO of the Council on Energy, Environment and Water; Carlos Lopes, Chair of the African Climate Foundation; Jacinda Ardern, former Prime Minister of New Zealand; Jonathan Pershing, former US Special Envoy for Climate Change; Laurence Tubiana, CEO of the European Climate Foundation; and Patricia Espinosa, former Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC. The authors are COP30 Brazilian Presidency Special Envoys for Strategic Regions. 🇺🇦

Jacinda Ardern is a former prime minister of New Zealand. Carlos Lopes, a former UN under-secretary-general, and Laurence Tubiana is a former French ambassador to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.



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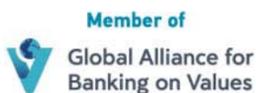
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Looking ahead to Nepal's 2027 elections

Time running out to pass the Electoral Reform Bill so the next polls are free, fair and inclusive

Shristi Karki

There is less than two years to go till elections to all three levels of government, and Nepal's major political parties are gearing up to engage voters.

The governing UML has launched its 'Mission 2084' campaign, but the party is being rocked by former president Bidhya Devi Bhandari's effort to join the electoral fray.

The UML's coalition partner, the Nepali Congress (NC) is wracked by rival contenders arguing over whether to hold its general convention before or after the next polls.

The opposition Maoist Centre is on a nationwide grassroots tour to rebuild its support base after it was ousted from the UML-Maoist coalition last year.

The leaders of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) in a strategic move are mobilising the diaspora to vote for the party symbol, bell, or influence family members back home.

RSP lawmaker Sumana Shrestha recently addressed Nepalis living overseas, urging them to participate in the next election.

'Save your time off, save your money, and come back home in 2027 — either to run for one of the 36,000 elected positions, or support those who are running for office,' Shrestha said. 'But whatever the case, you must come back to vote. Let's ring the bell in 2027.'

Overseas Nepalis emerged as an important bloc during the 2022 election because they convinced families back home to vote for new independent candidates, not established party nominees. RSP hopes to cash in on this anti-incumbent protest vote again.

The census put the country's absentee population at 2.1 million, but experts say it is at least double that. Most are in the 20-35 age group, and disillusioned with Nepal's serial leaders. Social media platforms allow them to be apprised of goings-on in Nepal, which means those living and working overseas are actively engaged in politics back home.

This week, the judiciary's judgement implementation directorate, in response to an application from lawyers associated with the RSP, sent a reminder to the Election Commission to act on the Supreme Court's 2018 ruling to guarantee Nepalis overseas their constitutional right to vote.

The Election Commission itself in 2023 registered the Bill to Amend and Consolidate the Election Law proposing various amendments including out of country voting, but the Bill has been idling at the Home Ministry for two years because of lack of support from the three main parties.

"The state and the Election Commission have been lethargic in taking action to ensure rights for out of country voting," former Chief Election Commissioner Bhoj Raj Pokharel told us.

Ensuring out of country voting rights is not a new idea. During the 1980 referendum on the Panchayat system, some embassy staff and officials abroad were allowed to vote. And the Election Commission floated the idea in 2008, but that did not go anywhere.

It is not just opposition from mainstream parties that has prevented voting by mail. There are also legal, financial, and technical challenges.

"In principle, we expect that our political leadership wants as many people as possible to exercise their franchise and participate in the political process," says Radhika Regmi Pokharel of The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES).



But, she adds, "In reality, if the leadership thinks absentee voting might jeopardise their chances of winning, they will be less keen on carrying out electoral reforms."

Nepali students, migrant workers, and people holding long-term residency permits are scattered across the world. It will be a challenge to set up voting booths at multiple points beyond embassies and consulates during elections, especially without bilateral agreements in place to designate spaces for polls.

Nepal's mixed first-past-the-post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system also means that conducting elections at a Nepali Embassy for example in Qatar where there are hundreds of thousands of Nepalis will be complicated, Pokharel explains. There are Nepalis from multiple constituencies in a host country, and FPTP ballots are different for each constituency, while PR voting only requires a single ballot.

"We can at least conduct PR

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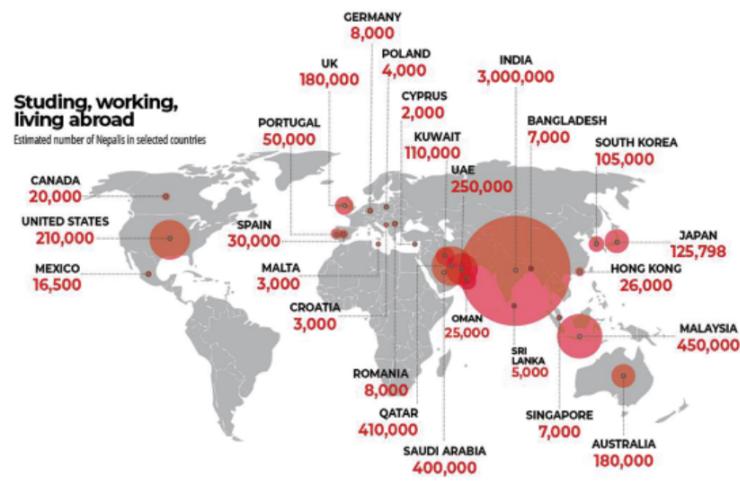
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SUMAN NEPALI



But it is not about guaranteeing voting rights just for those abroad, all eligible voters within Nepal must also be allowed to vote in the place of their domicile and not make a journey back to their districts.

“There is a lot of talk about out of country voting, but how about in country voting?” asks Regmi.

At present, Nepalis cannot vote from their current place of residence. Only election officials and security personnel can cast at least their PR ballots from where they are stationed.

Internal migration and inability to leave work means many cannot travel to their constituencies for election day. Some candidates therefore spend money to bus voters to their constituencies to vote.

While Nepalis have historically shown great enthusiasm at election time, the need to travel to vote combined with increasing apathy towards traditional parties, means turnout declined from 78% in 2017 to 62% in 2022.

Early voting, mail-in ballots, fixed election dates, and facilitating electronic voting would

make it easier for people both within and outside the country to vote. But mail-in voting will depend on the postal system, which is not reliable, and online voting may also have security challenges, both domestic and geopolitical.

Most of all, facilitating all these different methods of voting will require significant costs. “Ultimately, democracy does not come cheap, and we have to invest in it,” says Regmi.

Meanwhile, the governing UML-NC coalition has been debating constitutional amendments to reform the mixed election mechanism, an agenda they had hinged their partnership on when they formed their alliance last year.

Nepal’s political leadership has long maintained that the country’s mixed electoral system does not allow for one party to form a majority, only coalition governments, which has made governance and politics in Nepal unstable.

Coalition leaders say they want to amend the Constitution to ensure political stability by ensuring members of the House of Representatives are elected through

the FPTP system, and members of the National Assembly are chosen through the PR method.

However, experts say it is not so much the electoral system but governance and political leadership that are responsible for high government turnover and instability. They point to countries like Japan, Switzerland, and Germany which have stable politics despite having a similar mixed electoral scheme.

INCLUSIVE, DIVERSE

“Every electoral system has its unique characteristic, there is no one perfect system,” says Pokharel. “An electoral system does not guarantee stability, that is up to the drivers of our state mechanism.”

The proposed amendments risk rolling back the quotas and reservation that currently guarantee the representation of women and Nepalis from underserved communities in national politics.

“FPTP has become costly, and women and minority communities simply do not have the resources and network to compete with other candidates in more privileged positions,” says Regmi. “Currently proposed amendments will deal a heavy blow to inclusivity and diversity in governance.”

Promises of electoral reforms have not materialised into concrete plans of action. And with just two years to go for 2027, it will be difficult to organise out of country voting or modify the mixed electoral system — even if Parliament passes relevant laws.

“It is too late now to successfully set up the relevant infrastructure and systems overseas in time for 2027,” says Regmi.

Pokharel concurs: “They need a two-third majority in Parliament to successfully amend the Constitution. Barring a miracle, I don’t see a possibility of election reform before 2027.”

elections overseas, but that does not ensure complete electoral justice,” adds Pokharel. “The problem lies in implementing electoral laws in a way that ensures overseas voters can exercise their franchise.”

Experts say some pilot schemes for overseas voters can be started in select embassies where feasible.

“Even if we are not ready, the least we can do is to make sure that Nepalis abroad, in particular overseas migrant workers, are registered to vote, be it through Nepali embassies of the countries

they are based in, or when they leave Kathmandu airport, or at points along the Nepal-India border,” says Gopal Krishna Siwakoti at the Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL).

Whether or not they are able to vote, overseas Nepalis will nonetheless be influential in upcoming elections. “Nepali diaspora, especially those who are settled permanently abroad will influence voters here in Nepal to some extent even if they are loyal to a particular party,” adds Siwakoti.



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Publisher's Note

Imagine no Internet. No Facebook. No TikTok. No algorithm, no AI.

Year 2000. The world was gripped by the Y2K panic, The Millennium Bug that many feared would wreck global computer networks. The US waged punitive wars following 9/11. Google was launched in 1998, and its search engine and Gmail soon overtook AOL, Hotmail and Yahoo! The EU floated the Euro, and China was asserting itself on the world stage.

Nepal was still a monarchy. The country's population was only 23 million. Most people got their news on community radio. Evening news bulletins on tv channels had higher ratings than entertainment. Amidst political turmoil, readers bought national daily broadsheets at news-stands. Content was politically top-heavy. The Maoist conflict was entering its fifth year, and there was sporadic news of the government's Kilo Sierra 2 operation which killed more civilians than guerrillas, adding fuel to the insurgency.

The Nepali Congress (NC) and the UML were at each other's throats, calling for national shutdowns and squandering the hopes of renewal from a democracy their leaders fought to restore in the 1990 People's Movement. Hardliners in the royal family were getting restless.

Scientific proof about global warming, erratic weather and media coverage spread public

awareness about climate breakdown. Dire predictions about what was going to happen during the course of the century proved to be optimistic -- we are already seeing today what climatologists said would happen in 2100.

Back then, facts still mattered, the mainstream press swayed opinion, investigative journalism exposed wrongdoing and held power to account. In Nepal, editors and foreign correspondents were opinion-makers, some as well-known as political figures, and sometimes as powerful.

Nepali Times

Himalmedia Pvt Ltd was launched in 1998 with the flagship fortnightly Himal Khabarpatrika, and Nepali Times started in April 2000 with online content hosted on nepalnews.com. A practice issue was printed in May, and the #1 edition debuted in the week 19-25 July 2000 at the dawn of a new century and new millennium.

We chose the 'midi' size between broadsheet and tabloid, also called the Berliner format. Indian graphic artist Rustam Vania did the design of a paper convenient to hold and read, an easy and visually rich digest of happenings around the country in lively, stylish English.

But why English? We explained in the very first Editorial:

'In the heyday of the Panchayat in the early 1980s, we were often asked why we worked for The Rising Nepal. Our stock reply: "Because His Majesty reads it." Those were the days when few outside the charmed circle of Kathmandu expatriates and local elite read English. So what changed? First, the number of people who read English has grown ... English is a global lingua franca. There is a class of Nepalis who want more than just make-do English, they want to be fluent in it. English has another advantage: it is easier to be rational in it. One is expressive and effusive in one's mother tongue, feelings are stronger in the colloquial ... In a language that is learnt formally and among readers of an international language, there is less tolerance or intolerance.'

Today in the age of trolling and hate speech, maybe English is not so 'rational' after all. The social web has changed so much: readers are drawn to entertainment on digital platforms that mine their personal data and preferences, the political views of users are entrenched and radicalised by algorithms, there is less space for coherent give-and-take to find the middle ground in disputes.

The media's business model has failed under the predatory onslaught of Big Tech. At a time when a free and independent press is needed more than ever to counter populism, resolve wars, or find solutions to the climate crisis, the media is on mute. There is overt political and corporate control of content, and intolerance of tolerance is increasing. Journalism has had to reinvent itself to balance disinformation and falsehoods in cybersphere.

At the moment Nepal is a relatively open society, with one of the freest environments in Asia for media. There are efforts to curb that freedom by the other three branches of the state, but solidarity among journalists is strong.

Nepali Times itself survived the digital transition with an agile strategy that straddles both print and online for content dissemination and revenue. Those who started reading Nepali Times straight out of university when they were



25, are now 50 years old. We have kept a loyal readership, while welcoming a new generation of users -- some of them, surprisingly, preferring the print edition.

We have emphasised multimedia content, preferring to show rather than tell through interactive digital infographics and a well-visited YouTube channel. The hardcopy and online editions complement each other.

Nepali Times has 150,000 unique visitors per month on its website, and over 38% of you come in through the front door in organic searches, 39% through search engines, and the rest click links to stories on our social media posts. The average duration a reader spends on a Nepali Times article is relatively high compared to other media: 2 minutes. Despite the perception that the content is read by older people, it is still mostly popular in the 25-40 age group. Readers of the online pages are divided roughly 30:70 between Nepal and the rest of the world.

In an age of mobile phone saturation, endless scrolling on a small screen, there is still something to be said about the impact of high quality photographs on a 30 inch spread in the centerfold on this paper.

Which may be why despite print media worldwide either shutting down or in crisis, the number of subscribers buying the print edition delivered to their homes or offices every Friday morning in Kathmandu has been constant over the past 25 years.

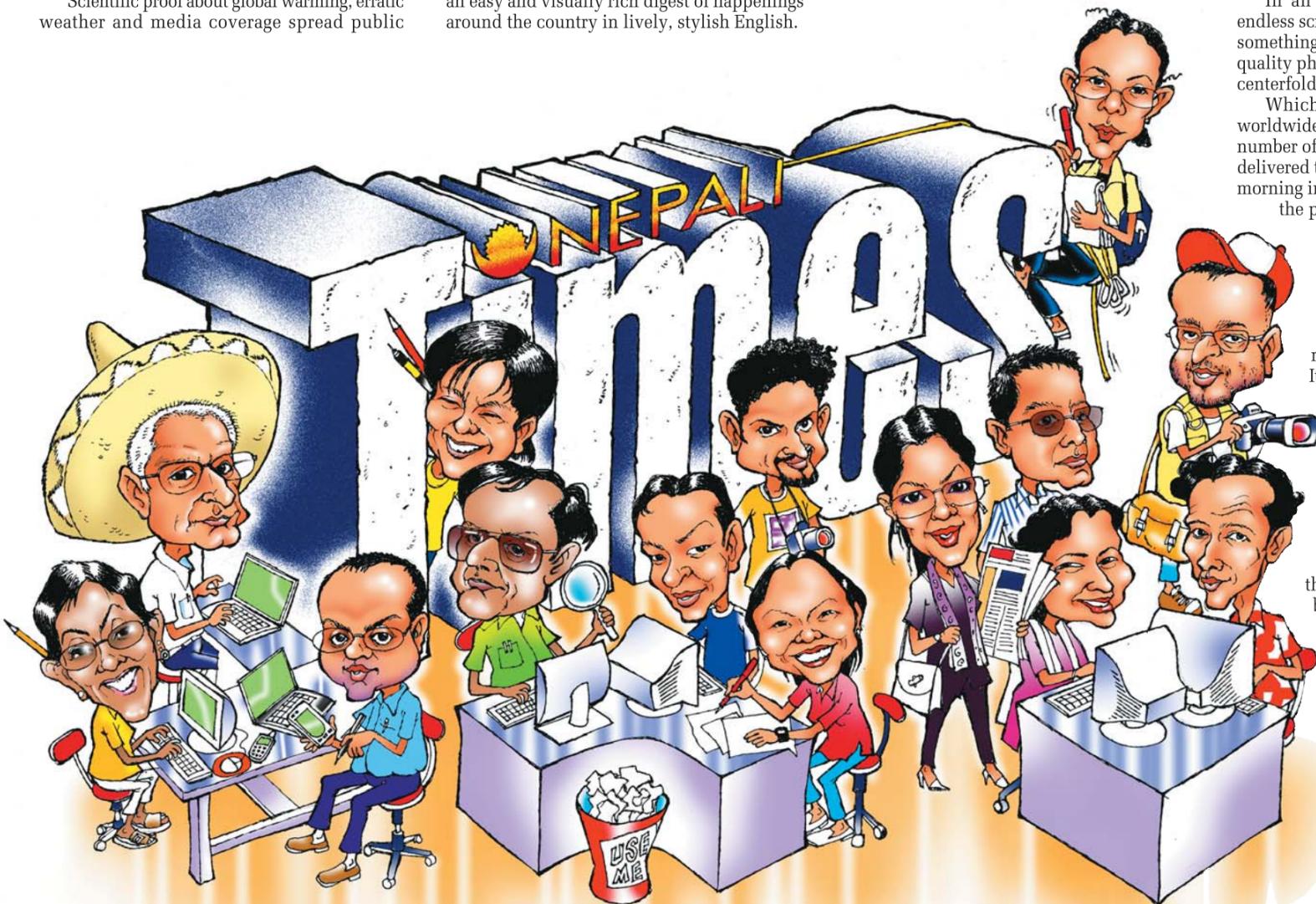
Nepali Times is also available as an e-paper on www.nepalitimes.com as well as a weekly newsletter emailed to about 4,000 subscribers through Substack every Sunday.

Himalmedia has now been repurposed as a non-profit company. Its Himal Khabar magazine and Nepali Times will remain dedicated to fostering a national conversation of issues before they become problems.

Media consumption is shifting, readers are fragmented by algorithm and devices, but it is good, old-fashioned reporting that keeps society informed of trends affecting their lives. Journalism that is fair and balanced provides perspective to make sense of the cacophony.

We thank all readers, partners and well-wishers in Nepal and the rest of the world for being with us for the last 25 years. We look forward to the next 25 with a fresh and youthful newsroom team.

Kunda Dixit
Former Editor, and Publisher



SUBHAS RAI'S RENDITION OF THE NEPALI TIMES NEWSROOM FOR THE PAPER'S FIRST ANNIVERSARY IN 2001. FROM L-R: ANAGHA NEELKANTAN, KUNDA DIXIT, BINOD BHATTARAI, SUBHAS RAI, C K LAL, ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY, HEMLATA RAI, SALIL SUBEDI, SUNAINA SHAH, ANUP BARAL, SWASTI RAJBHANDARI, KIRAN MAHARJAN, MIN BAJRACHARYA, RAMYATA LUMBU.

2000

Nepali Times was born at the dawn of the new millennium. It started publishing online in May 2000 before the #1 print edition in the week of 19-25 July 2000. But a month before that, there was a practice #0 which had a Publisher's Note titled 'The Freedom To Be Fair' on page 1. Here is an excerpt:

'It was a journalist who once said that journalists are people without any ideas, but with an ability to express them. These are cynical times, and it is people in media who are most cynical about the media. For too long journalists have taken objectivity as our main mantra, forgetting fairness.

Objectivity is not having to make up your mind about anything, fairness is hearing all sides. Globally, and within countries society's balance of justice is heavily skewed by the weight of the powerful. Objectivity perpetuates this status quo, fairness tries to set things right.

We at Nepali Times and other publications of the Himalmedia group are committed to professionalism and high-quality journalism ... upholding the freedom to be fair.'

These were heady times for Nepal's mainstream press during the constitutional monarchy days. One had to use dialup through a modem and phone line to access the Internet. Nepal Telecom had just started its GSM mobile service, and we all proudly carried around Nokia 3310s with tiny LCD displays.

It would be six years before Twitter started. YouTube was launched in 2005 after its former



PayPal founders were caught up in the Asian Tsunami in Thailand, and found there was no platform for sharing videos. It would be another eight years before algorithms began pushing cat videos to users.

The masthead of the #1 print edition of Nepali Times of 19-25 July 2000 carried the ambitious 'Nepal's Top Newspaper'. The Editorial titled 'A Sign of the Times' said in part: 'Newspapers do more than hold the mirror to society. They are the mirror. Journalism is called history in a hurry. It is also culture, sociology, anthropology, philology, and philosophy in a hurry. Nepali Times will aspire to be a true reflection of our times...'

Indian graphic designer Rustam Vania was invited to Kathmandu in April 2000 and designed a newspaper with a fresh, modern look.

His rendition of the masthead and the page template has not changed in 25 years, though much has changed in Nepal, even while a lot has remained the same. Reports and op-eds about air pollution, hydropower exports, investment, political back-stabbing from two decades ago are as relevant today as they were then. Most of the protagonists are the same people, just a little greyer and chubbier.

In the first of his many thoughtful columns 'State of the State', C K Lal lamented the cynicism in Nepali society: 'Nepal's nabobs of negativism hold forth in their nay-saying nooks. Cynicism is at least a reflection of exaggerated self-worth. Despair is much worse, it is a state of having lost all hope.' Sounds familiar?

Water resources expert Dipak Gyawali argued in a commentary that it made more sense for private power producers to build reservoir projects not for export, but to make up for the dry season power shortfall.

A debate even more prescient today.

Manjushree Thapa's Nepal literature column profiled Nepali writers with translated excerpts. The paper serialised chapters from Desmond Doig's book In the Kingdom of the Gods. The Backside satire column featured 'Under My Hat' and 'The Ass'. Nepali Times even carried a weekly horoscope, cigarette and alcohol advertisements.

Journalism is indeed history in a hurry. Those who do not learn from it are doomed to repeat it. Browse the past 25 years of Nepali Times through the online archive on HTML and the ePaper through Archive Nepal. <https://www.archivenepal.org/nepalitimes>

2001

As the Maoist conflict intensified, a demoralised Nepal Police fought with 303 rifles. It launched 'Romeo' and 'Kilo Sierra 2' Operations to hunt Maoists, but killed and tortured a whole lot of civilians whose families then joined the guerrillas. ('Kilo Sierra' seemed to be accurately named because it was all about 'killing'.)

Girija Prasad Koirala of the Nepali Congress (NC) was prime minister, trying to keep both his party and the country from splintering. The opposition UML was shutting down Kathmandu every other week, forcing people off the streets by terrorising them with arson on vehicles that defied strikes.

Koirala himself was under pressure to resign after the CIAA implicated his party's top figures of taking kickbacks in the lease of a Boeing 767 from Austria's Lauda Air. He also wanted to form a separate Armed Police Force (APF) to fight the Maoists with heavier weapons.

A worried King Birendra watched warily as feckless, corrupt politicians squabbled and the Maoist violence spread. As constitutional monarch, he was under pressure from hardliners in his family to be more decisive, and take control of the country.

On the morning of Friday 1 June 2001, the Editorial in Nepali Times was titled 'Long Live the King'. On page 14 was a translation of a piece from Naya Sadak newspaper by Kishore Nepal titled 'A Suitable Prince' about Crown Prince Dipendra's marriage prospects. It read: 'Crown Prince Dipendra turns 31 on 27 June. It is high time he got married.'

Both articles turned out to be bizarrely prescient because that evening at 8:45PM Dipendra opened fire at a royal family dinner with several automatic weapons, killing his father the king, his mother the queen, his brother and sister, two aunts and



an uncle before turning the gun on himself.

The dead and wounded were rushed to the Military Hospital in Chhauni, from where Nepali Times carried an eye-witness account by the surgeon, Upendra Devkota, who tried to save their lives.

Dipendra was in a coma for four days despite a bullet through his head. Nepal erupted in grief, shock and anger. Conspiracy theories flew faster than the truth. Nepali Times reported this like it would any crime story: speaking to eye witnesses, corroborating their testimonies, triple checking the facts.

The 6 June issue headlined 'The Kings Are Dead, Long Live the King', on 15 June was a banner headline that many did not want to believe: 'It Was Dipendra.' (with a fullstop) and on 22 June the paper pieced together all the evidence with a 3D diagram of the scene of the massacre in Narayanhiti with the headline 'Three Kings in Four Days'.

By November, the Maoists pounced on the palace massacre to take the insurgency to the next level by attacking Royal Nepal Army bases and capturing heavy weapons, dragging the military into the war.

While the war intensified in Nepal, the United States suffered the 9/11 attacks which was featured on page 1 with the headline 'Kamikaze'.

2002

On midnight 16 February 2002, on the sixth anniversary of the beginning of the insurgency, the Maoists launched the biggest attack till then against the state. Some 2,500 Maoist guerrillas stormed the town of Mangalsen in Achham in far west Nepal and went about strategically bombing government buildings and executing officials and security personnel.

All 57 soldiers in the Mangalsen garrison, along with 77 policemen and five civilians were killed while many government buildings and Sanfebagar airport were destroyed. Up until that point, the Mangalsen raid was the single most damaging strike by the Maoists.

Many heavy weapons were looted. Thirty-six civilian workers building an airfield were killed in Kalikot when the Army in hot pursuit mistook them for guerrillas.

The Royal Nepal Army was now in the war, and more people were killed in the next 12 months than in the previous six years of conflict.

The page 1 story Nation in Grief was by Umid Bagchand. Narendra Shrestha's photograph showed an army honour guard saluting fallen comrades at Pashupati cremation site as a grandmother looked on, capturing the sombre mood of the nation in mourning.



The story read:

'Twenty of the dead soldiers had execution-style bullet wounds in the head. Other bodies were severely charred. One injured soldier had his hand blown off when he picked up a Maoist grenade and tried to throw it back to them.'

He survived because the Maoists gave him up for dead. We were not allowed to speak to the other survivor, who was in a state of shock. In a simultaneous attack, the Maoists also destroyed the airfield at Sanfebagar 20 km to the north, killing another 27 policemen.

With the barracks razed and nearly everyone killed, the Maoists had a run of the district headquarters. The policemen put up a brave defence, fighting almost to the last man, but they were overwhelmed by numbers and the Maoists' better weapons.

The attackers used automatic rifles, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades captured during the Ghorahi raid on 23 November. The Maoists looted another 55 automatic weapons and five machine guns from the Mangalsen barracks.'

The country was shaken to its core by the devastating scale of the attack, but it was also a tragic tale of warnings not heeded.



As Bagchand reported for Nepali Times the week following the attack, the Maoists had distributed pamphlets, pasted posters, organised rallies warning of an impending attack on the district headquarters, and sent threatening letters to the district administration which was passed on to Kathmandu.

The Chief District Officer Mohan Singh Khatri, who was killed in the attack, had said at an all-party meeting a few weeks prior that Kathmandu would likely send reinforcements only for their funerals, and as it turned out, the first army helicopters from the capital landed at 10AM on 12 February, just to pick up the corpses.

In an editorial that week titled Coming out of Slaughter, we said that this cannot continue any longer and a real solution was in non-violent struggle, democracy, and social progress.

'We have a situation here: democracy is threatened by an ultra-violent group that does not believe in it. Their reach has widened dramatically in the past six years, and they have used brutal violence to cleverly fill the vacuum left by the state.'

And as the threat to our democracy and freedoms get more and more serious, our parliamentary parties and factions within them continue to use that threat to bring each other down.

Successive rulers since 1996 have squandered the political option: the civil police couldn't fight the war so an armed police force was set up, the laws of the land were not enough and the anti-terrorism act was needed, constitutional provisions did not suffice and so an emergency was declared and the army unleashed. And the problem is still there. If anything, it is getting bigger.'

And bigger it did get. The Maoist war had already cost 3,200 lives until then, but would go on to claim more than five times that number by the time the peace accord was signed in 2006, and the former rebels were brought to mainstream politics.

But the absence of war didn't mean peace, as we found out in the years since.

2003

The beginning of 2003 was marked by a ceasefire agreement between the government and the Maoists on 29 January. But it was short-lived and collapsed on 27 August following three rounds of failed peace talks. The country went back to violence, and journalist Gyanendra Khadka was beheaded in Sindhupalchok. Young children were used as pawns with private school shutdowns as well as kidnapping and murders. Subsequently,



issue #156 where environmentalist Bhushan Tuladhar looked into how the concentration of particulate matter from newly set up monitoring stations showed that people were breathing air with pollutants several times higher than the WHO standard. The main culprit: vehicular emission made worse by adulterated fuel, and soot particles from the brick kilns.

That year we also exposed toxic effluent being discharged into the Narayani River by a paper mill (pictured), threatening the ecology of Chitwan National Park downstream. The investigation showed toxicity analyses of Narayani water:

‘One indicator of pollution is Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD), and according to Nepali law, COD content in industrial discharge cannot exceed 250 mg/l. A sample of Bhrikuti’s effluent showed a whopping 979.6 mg/l...’

Measuring the pH value of discharge is an indicator of alkaline content, and the paper mill’s effluent was 11.5 on the pH scale, whereas this value is not supposed to exceed pH 9 in industrial discharges. Since the pH scale is logarithmic, this means that the alkalinity of Bhrikuti’s effluent was almost 1,000 times more than permissible standards. The researchers also detected high concentrations of ammonium nitrate and nitrite.’

Back in 2003 we were already reporting on a ban on Nepali women going to work in the Gulf following the death by suicide of Kani Sherpa who was sexually abused by her employer in Qatar. We said the restriction was a serious

violation of freedom of mobility, livelihood and self-determination rights, especially as the ban was arbitrary and implemented haphazardly at Kathmandu airport.

Interestingly, in issue #156, Shiva Gaule exposed Kathmandu airport for being a global centre for human trafficking:

‘Kathmandu airport is not just where Nepalis use fake documents to get out of their country, it is also getting the reputation among the international human smuggling networks as an easy airport to transit. Our lax controls, immigration desks with inadequate counterfeit detection equipment, rampant corruption, and a huge domestic demand for fake travel documents from Nepalis desperate to migrate for a better life make it an ideal jump-off point.’

more and more people were fleeing for the comparative safety of Kathmandu, adding to the capital’s unsustainable urban sprawl.

While the war waged in the countryside, Kathmandu was becoming unlivable in other ways. The quality of air was worsening by the day. The Supreme Court banned vehicles older than 20 years from plying, but that was not the answer. A page 1 headline ‘Gasp’ on issue #137 drew attention to the unbreathable air. Twenty-two years later, things have changed -- but for the worse.

We doubled down on the crisis with another spread ‘Breathing is Harmful to Health’ on

2004

The Maoist war was at its peak, the rebels were attacking one district headquarters after another, people were being disappeared, Nepalis were killing fellow Nepalis.

King Gyanendra had dismissed Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba for failing to hold elections and negotiate with the insurgents. By this point, the Maoists were also organised into the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), a centralised military force with battalion-level formations. The eastern division was led by Nanda Kishor Pun (later vice president), and the western division by Barshaman Pun (later finance minister).

The night of terror which has since been dubbed the Battle of Beni started at 10:30PM on Saturday, 20 March, and the fighting continued until 6AM the next day.

Soldiers and police guarding the police station fought until ammunition ran out, the CDO building next door was reduced to rubble, and the army camp was the only government building standing, albeit barely.

Thomas Bell, a Kathmandu-based correspondent for the Daily Telegraph, was one of the first foreign journalists on the scene, and had a dramatic eyewitness account in Nepali Times issue #189:

‘Lt Col Ragu Nepali’s office with its sandbagged windows is a wreck. He estimates there were at least 5,000 Maoists involved in the attack: frontline fighters, militia and porters.

‘They came in waves, like the sea, one after another, one after another,’ said Lt Col Nepali, looking exhausted after two

nights without sleep. ‘There were more women than men. And many, many child soldiers, below 14. I saw them while I was shooting back.’ There were six Maoist bodies inside the army base and Nepali points them out: ‘They are all young children, this one is a girl.’...

After the sun came up, they were walking here like they were coming home from a movie. Singing, joking, showing no fear.’

Accompanying the piece was a photograph by Bell of Jamila Khatun washing blood from her shopfront in Beni while her three-year-old daughter Sajita watched. The picture would go on to become an iconic image of the war and was included in Nepali Times’ publisher Kunda Dixit’s The People’s War trilogy, a pictorial documentation of the armed conflict in Nepal.

In total, 19 civilians, 17 police and 14 soldiers were killed in the Beni attack, while at least 90 Maoists were slain. There were prisoners on both sides including Matrika Yadav from the Maoists.

The Battle of Beni was one of the biggest attacks on a district headquarters, and a turning point in the conflict. Following Beni, the Army bolstered the defence of its garrisons, and the Maoists shifted to ambushing security convoys along the highways.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan who had been to Nepal in 2001 expressed serious concern and offered to help find a solution. In our editorial that week, we said:

‘Kofi Annan has echoed the sentiments of nearly all Nepalis: that there is no military solution to the conflict.’

The United Nations went on to set up the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) in 2007 to support the peace process following the end of the war. But the body was largely criticised for overstepping its mandate, disagreements over exit strategy, and perceived bias towards the Maoists, among others.

Maoist supremo Pushpa Kamal Dahal in a leaked 2009 video even boasted of deceiving the UNMIN about the actual number of their fighters to 35,000 when the real figure was closer to 7,000-8,000.



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2005

1 February, 2005. 10AM. King Gyanendra went on Nepal Television with a Royal Proclamation saying he was taking over. He criticised the political parties, condemned the Maoists, and sacked Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. Telephone, mobile, and internet lines went dead and the airport was closed. Civil society activists, politicians and others were arrested from their homes. A State of Emergency was declared and the king took up emergency powers, declaring that he would chair a handpicked council of ministers for up to 3 years (pictured).

The declaration included the suspension of the freedom of speech, assembly, the right to property, information and against preventive detention.

'His Majesty's Government has banned for six months any interview, article, news, notice,

New ministers

Samaya, 4:11 February

As per Article 137 of the 1990 constitution, King Gyanendra has formed a new cabinet under his chairmanship. The king appointed 10 ministers from different ethnic backgrounds: Sher Bahadur Deuba, Chandra Shekhar Jaisi, Krishna Lal Thakuri and Thakuri who hail from the hills, and Khatiwada Valley. Seven of the ministers are new faces in the public arena:

- Ramesh Chandra Paudyal, Foreign Affairs**
Was repeatedly appointed minister during the Panchayat era and twice as member of the National Assembly. Served as minister for information, population and environmental and tourism.
- Rajendra Khatiwada, Education and Sports**
Founding member of Nepal Communist Party (M). Unable to get membership in the permanent committee of the UML after the Janapratik Convention in 2003, he has distanced himself from the party. Served as chairman of the United Left Front and was elected minister during the nine month NC-UML coalition government.
- Krishna Lal Thakuri, General Administration**
Minister for General Administration in the first Deuba cabinet. Well known politician but created new identity by taking a strong stance against UML's frequent and random transfer of government officials. Appointed member of the National Assembly and member secretary of Development Committee of Mustang.
- Building Bajracharya, Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation**
Former mayor of Lalitpur, also served as postman during the Panchayat era. Bajracharya says he will continue on culture. Elected mayor of Patan under a UML ticket and is a member of the Raj Prasad.
- Khudga Bahadur GC, Local Development**
From the Maoist-affected Pychowar district, served as zonal commissioner and was known as a hardliner. Began in politics with the leftist students' union.
- Tanka Shrestha, Information and Communication**
Twice appointed to the Rastriya Panchayat, used to be general secretary of Nepal Nationalist Independent Student's Council, never before been appointed to an executive post.
- Deo Bahadur Shrestha, Home and Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs**
Former secretary of the Civil Service Commission and Ministry of Agriculture, Zonal Commissioner of Kosi during Panchayat.
- Manjushree Shrestha, Finance**
Development economist, was special economic adviser at the Ministry of Finance, served as advisor to Finance Minister Prakash Chandra Lovari during the Thapa government. Founded CEDA at Tribhuvan University, president of Nepal Organisation, training adviser at UNDP, Geneva.
- Durga Shrestha, Women, Children and Social Welfare**
RPP central member, also served as member of the Rastriya Panchayat in the old days.
- Ram Narayan Singh, Minister for Labour and Transport Management**
Former COO.

All the king's (new) men
The reshuffle proves King Gyanendra is not deviating from his roadmap.

He's tough, yet gentle. Truly, he is my Special Editions Man!

view or personal opinion that goes against the letter and spirit of the Royal Proclamation on 1 February 2005 and that directly or indirectly supports destruction and terrorism,' read a notice in Gorkhapatra on 3 February.

FM radio stations were only allowed to broadcast music, not news. So some news readers started singing the news in duets from the studio. Army censors were sent to newsrooms to vet copy. Nepali Times went to press with white holes where the soldiers had instructed us to delete paragraphs, cartoons or entire columns.

The editorial on issue #233, 4-10 February was about trees giving oxygen -- as a metaphor for democracy and free press. Excerpt:

The sudden epidemic of tree-felling along Kathmandu's streets is drastic, misguided and not consonant with the needs of the population...The role of trees is to introduce oxygen into the atmosphere and to ingest the carbon dioxide that human and mechanical activity spews into our enclosed airspace.

They provide shade to the pedestrian, a demographic category which today is highly neglected by our increasingly motorised urban

populace. Tree-lined boulevards and parks are the mark of any civilised society and the colour of leaves and bark have associations in the human mind with the very evolution of the species. Take away the trees from our sight and senses and our very existence suffers.'

The Nepali Times masthead started to carry a fuel gauge to indicate to readers the degree of censorship of that edition. An 'Empty' gauge signified that the issue was relatively free of censorship.

The royal-military coup was not altogether a surprise, and there was some support for it because people were fed up with the shenanigans of the political parties, and the violence unleashed by the Maoists.

Reader Ranjit Rauniyar wrote:

'It is easy to decry the overthrow of an elected government and express concern about the suspension of civil liberties. I, like all Nepalis, will be watching closely to see how King Gyanendra wields the sweeping powers he has assumed.

But I hope the rest of the world, before rushing to instant judgement, will pause to consider how far Nepal had gone down the path towards becoming a failed state, before the king resorted to such desperate measures.'

2006

After 10 years of agonising war, and three weeks of expanding street protests, by the stroke of the midnight hour on 24 April 2006, king Gyanendra finally restored Parliament. Girija Prasad Koirala was reappointed prime minister and mobile phone service was restored, FM radio stations could broadcast news again. It would take three more days for the Maoists to declare a ceasefire with a mammoth victory rally at Tundikhel.

The page 1 foldout of a Nepali Times Special Edition that week (right) carried an iconic photo by Ajay Joshi of a student protester wearing a paper crown and ridiculing Gyanendra with an impersonation.

Such an act would have surely meant imprisonment a day previously, but the laughing faces in the crowd were proof that the fear was gone. Gyanendra's time was up.

But Nepal's politicians being who they are delayed the formation of the interim cabinet because of competing demands for powerful portfolios among the SPAM (Seven Party Alliance + Maoists). The following months of 2006 showed that the People's Movement had changed the regime without changing the mindset of the leadership to show vision and action.

By the end of 2006, there were ominous signs of things to come. As Nepali Times wrote in an editorial printed on 22-28 December:

'The euphoria over the ceasefire of the past nine months is now being replaced by a worrying sense of foreboding about ethnic, separatist, and religious fissures that are opening up. Part of this is caused by reaction and resentment that was welling up after the restoration of democracy. Partly it is also identity politics where the radical fringes of the Maoist and other parties have taken to extreme and militant rhetoric to leapfrog into the political arena.'

The Maoists needed to be demobilised, disarmed and reintegrated, and the United Nations was called upon (with New Delhi's blessing) to form UNMIN to supervise the process.

Ian Martin, who was with the OHCHR office in Kathmandu was deputed to head the team that grew to carry out the mammoth task of arms management in camps for the former guerrillas across the country.

This cartoon (right) about the peace process by Rabin Sayami from page 1 of the 8-14 December 2006 edition showed Girija Prasad Koirala scrubbing the dirt of corruption, and Prachanda washing blood from his hands at a spout from which the water of peace flowed out.

Between 2002-2006 the paper carried the syndicated comic strip, Yak Yeti Yak by Miku. It starred a talkative Yak and a Yeti with an existential crisis. Often absurd and sometimes deeply philosophical, the strip had a cult following among readers, who chuckled briefly

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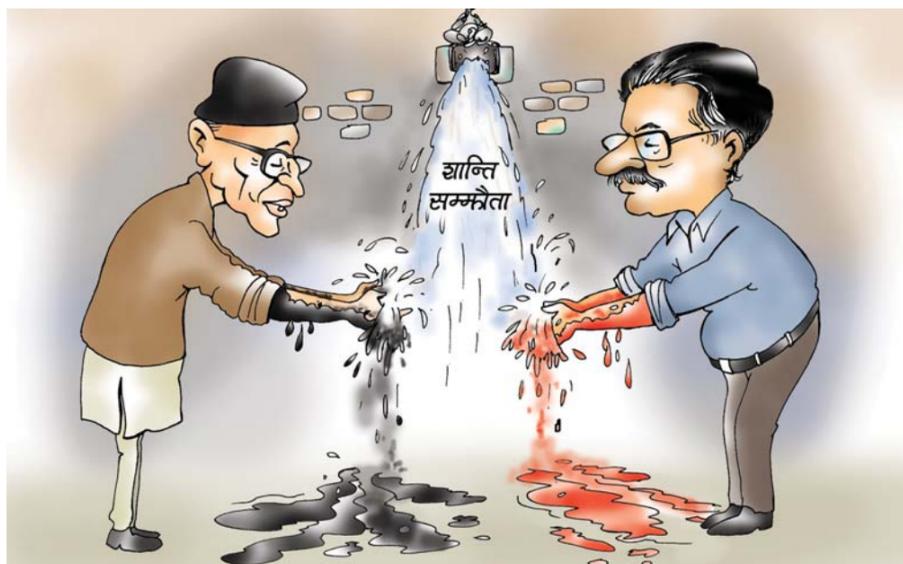
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every Friday morning. The toons are in storage at Nepali Times Archives.

2006 also saw the monumental tragedy in which the pioneers of Nepal's internationally-acclaimed conservationists were killed in a helicopter crash in Ghunsa.

The chopper was carrying 24 passengers including Chandra Gurung, Harka Gurung, Mingma Sherpa, Dawa Tsering, Yeshe Lama. The headline of issue #317 simply said in big bold letters: VOID. The editorial 'Still Among Us', urged the need to carry on:

'In a country where there is so little to celebrate, it is a cruel blow to take away the little that stood out. The people who boarded the helicopter in Ghunsa on Saturday morning were all enormously talented, experienced, and dedicated. We owe it to them to continue their work, to innovate and prove by doing that nature conservation and economic progress can go hand in hand.'

A week before the crash, the Times ran an article on how the conflict was affecting conservation. As the Maoists had stepped up their activities, forest guard posts had been abandoned, game scouts had been killed by landmines, and abduction, ambushes and extortion had forced conservationists to stop their work. Poaching had intensified.

The Comprehensive Peace Accord was signed on 21 November, 2006 codifying the ceasefire, bringing an end to the decade long conflict that cost 17,000 Nepali lives.

While it is easy to be frustrated with Nepali politics, looking back with the benefit of 25 years of hindsight leads to the realisation that progress, while slow, is taking place.

Peace has reigned for the most part, and the vision of multiparty democracy and federalism has been realised even if they need major tweaks. History also warns about hastily bringing the king back, look at what it cost to get him out in the first place. 🇳🇵

2007

After a jam packed 2006, Nepal's nascent democracy cautiously inched forward under an interim constitution and eight parties going into government. However, there were concerns that the alliance were making no effort to listen to the needs of the Madhesi, Dalit, and indigenous communities.

The Madhesi were in particular incensed, because they felt that the new political system was not being fair to them.

'Discriminated against by governments in the past, the Madhes saw that it would be denied political representation in proportion to its numbers by the interim constitution too,' wrote Kunda Dixit on the front page of issue #333.

Five people had been killed in unrest in Lahan, and there had been violence and looting in Birganj, Biratnagar, and Janakpur.

The Maoists found they could not control the genie they let out of the bottle with their ethnic-based politics. The radical Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha (JTMM) had splintered from the Maoists and was demanding an independent Madhes, and there were other groups that were willing to hold talks with the alliance in Kathmandu.

Generally, the three main Madhesi demands were: a federal state, proportional representation, and re-demarcation of electoral constituencies to take into account population density in the Tarai.

Yet there was speculation that dismissed the violence, as a plot by royalists to subvert CA elections, or Maoists inciting hatred between hill and plains and pahadis to keep themselves in power.

Beyond political demands, there also was a deeper feeling of alienation from the Nepali identity that was driving the protests in the plains. "Most importantly what Madhesi people need is acceptance and confidence in them as people of Nepal," wrote a blogger in the active blog-space of the time.



The protests ended in late August, with the government striking a deal with the Mashes Janadhikar Forum leader Upendra Yadav promising to change the country into a federal state with autonomy, and ensured proportional representation of Madhesis in all state organs.

Talking to columnist Prashant Jha, Yadav saw these terms as the "maximum achievement possible under the present situation," a compromise so polls could take place. But comrades saw it as a betrayal.

The week of the deal, bombs went off in Kathmandu, the first violence since the conflict ended. They were claimed by an unknown group called Tarai Army. In his Plain Speaking column in #380, Prashant Jha called 2007 The Year of the Madhes:

'Nepal is not the same country anymore. Nepal can never be described as just a country of mountains, even in a tourist brochure. Any party that ignores Madhesi sentiments cannot remain a national entity for long.'

2008

Two years after the conflict ended, the country prepared for the first election to the Constituent Assembly which under the peace agreement was to draft the new Constitution. Campaigning was fierce, with sporadic residual violence from the war. Everyone was predicting a win for the NC and UML, the two established parties at the time, but when the results came out it was a near landslide for the Maoists.

Even Pushpa Kamal Dahal could not believe it. Analysts scrambled to explain the surprise win, and the conclusion was that it was a protest vote against the NC and UML that had taken turns to rule since 1990, their constant infighting and corruption and lack of accountability to the people.



Even those who had suffered from Maoist violence voted for the party. Many of the votes were therefore not for the Maoists, but for peace – make them win so they do not go back to the mountains and become guerrillas.

Chairman Prachanda went on to become Prime Minister Dahal, and the first act of the Constituent Assembly was to abolish the monarchy and declare Nepal a republic.

That very evening in June, king Gyanendra held a chaotic Narayanhiti Palace news conference, and said "Bye bye I'm off", and drove away in his Jaguar to Nagarjun.

Nepal was in a no war no peace situation. There was prolonged wrangling about who would be president to replace the king, and the Maoist vanguard YCL was back to its old ways of extorting businesses. In government, the Maoists developed a thin skin against criticism, and started attacking the media.

Dahal told a Maoist mass meeting in Tundikhel in September: "I have told the editor of Kantipur that if he keeps on criticising us he will have to face the consequences because the people have now made us victorious."

The very next week, the YCL attacked the van carrying copies of that week's edition of Himal Khabarpatrika that was critical of such activities and made a bonfire out of the magazines.

And on 28 December, the former guerrillas vandalised the offices of Himal and Nepali Times and assaulted the CEO, editor and other staff.

C K Lal wrote in his weekly Nepali Times column State of the State:

'Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal lacks the moral authority to rein in groups that challenge the authority of the state. After all, he owes his political ascendancy to those who defied prevailing laws by force of arms under his direction. Welcome to the world of the post insurgency, moral-legal vacuum, where brute force is the only law.'

The Maoist-led government's inability to prevent the attack at Himal Khabarpatrika sends out a message that the media is not able to exercise their freedom. Unless the Maoists plan to go back to war, they need to understand that maintaining a peaceful society is their primary responsibility.'

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CONSTITUTION 2010

Times 2-8 JANUARY 2009 #432 7

One country two armies

Continued war relations between CP, Maoists and Pragna Kamal Dahal mean that the peace process, including the 12-point agreement, has not been implemented. This has caused the state of political instability. The integration of the PLA through dialogue and consensus is urgently needed if the country is to achieve any semblance of political stability. The Maoists are pushing integration whereas the other parties are not willing to accept it so easily.

The peace process and constitution-writing will be in danger as long as we have two armies



COMMENT
Dhrub Kumar

The opposition NC, as well as coalition partners UML and CP, are questioning integration of Maoist guerrillas. The Maoists blame the NC for the stalemate. The NC had formed a joint special committee because the terms of reference stated that decisions should be made by majority and not consensus, which it said was against the peace accord.

Other parties argue that more integration would be detrimental to the integrity of the national army. The Maoists do little to further the process when they seek support and consent from other parties for political interest and then lead through their own way.

Prime Minister Pragna Kamal Dahal, who labelled the NC as "unhappy", "unrepresentative", and Maoist parties as "hanging lockers", seemed to have forgotten they are meant to form a coalition government.

The document to which he stated this also mentioned the final hurdle was not to be sought, affecting that the Maoists' need to integrate the PLA into the national army to form a unified force. PLA political indoctrination and VTC, and military structure and its unaltered activities made army integration in the near-suspension.

All political parties agree on the inclusive structure and demarcation of the Nepal Army. Action has to be taken to narrow the existing gap between the

army and society, in which people, irrespective of caste, creed and ethnicity, would join the army based on their ability alone. But the army as an institution where a person has to rise up the ranks to be commander-in-chief (Chieftan) just plank someone there as one would do in the civil service organisations.

When Gurbak Singh formed the national army in 1994, the number of recruits was expected to be around 130,000. There were 80,000 national army soldiers, 32,000 ANC combatants, 6,000 CP and Maoist guerrillas and about 15,000 paramilitary.

But only 15,000 of the 38,000 guerrilla fighters were integrated. Subsequently, Maoist General Bhattarai, the chief of the army, which presented security and comp. Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe was a revolutionary leader but he did not know how to integrate an army post conflict. The integration of ANA, CPMA and the Maoist Khukhuria Army was intended to check the number of soldiers and make it efficient, but it was never implemented during the integration process.

The Maoists sought an election and

cases to present. But when its response leader who leading the government critic was the parliamentary system and follow leaders, he cannot expect a positive response. The people's sympathy is on the level policy of the Maoists through which it wants to capture state power. The main obstacle to this change in the Nepal Army, which is why this has become the main target of the Maoists, is the PLA integration into the national army is the only legal and bloodless means of doing so.

All the Maoists need to do is to combine with whom and in what situation it signed the 12-point agreement. There is a lesson there.

Dhrub Kumar is a political scientist and security analyst.

New recruits

It is against the peace agreement to recruit personnel into the Nepal Army and the Maoist force. The Nepal Army has carried out two recruitment drives in the past two years for vacancies for the post of Second Lieutenant. In that line, there was no reaction to this. But two months ago, when the army received Defence Ministry clearance to recruit non-combatants there was a protest from the Maoists and even UNMIN issued a statement. If this was a threat to the peace process, why was there no reaction to the previous recruitment of combatants?

2009

After the Maoists came to power, reintegration of the Maoist combatants and moving ahead with the peace process became a priority. But most of these remained neglected as underlying issues of ethnicity, gender and struggle for power persisted.

The leading political parties: NC and UML were against the integration of Maoists into the Nepal Army. Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal accused the opposition of the lack of support. Analyst Dhrub Kumar in his column (left) for issue #432 wrote:

'As long as there are two armies, the peace process and constitution-writing will be in danger. The responsibility lies with the Maoists and the head of government to convince the coalition partners and the opposition through a negotiation process by first building trust. In the present situation, the Maoists can't do much on their own. They have to work with the other parties and for this they must make the others trust them.'

2010

Technology was taking a big leap forward. Schools had started to equip themselves with computer labs with LED screens, and coding was taught to eager students.

Rotary Clubs started donating computers to schools so that they could learn and enlighten them with the technology. The 'One Laptop per Child' project was launched in rural schools, even as the government schools fell behind because of the lack of investment. Internet was also new, and schools started to install connections to broaden the horizon of knowledge for their students.

Chaudhary Group also initiated campaigns through which adults could win a laptop and nominate a student to get it. The coupons to win

laptops were put in packets of Wai Wai noodles.

Arun Sighaniya, chairman of Janakpur Today, was shot on 1 March spreading concern about on safety of media personnel and journalists. Janakpur Today was the first local newspaper to get a top category classification from the Press Council of Nepal.

In response, CK Lal in his column State of the State in #506 wrote:

'The media stands to play an even greater role in the political contestations of the future. This could be why investors are willing to bear huge losses and hold on to their niches. With the increasing complexity of the cutthroat competition within the media, the responsibility of media watchdogs will only grow heavier.'

The community FM culture thrived, but faced a midlife crisis as stations started being bought by people with local and national political affiliations. Many radio stations such as Gandaki FM established themselves as television and print media to tackle the increased competition. Commentaries and featured content were broadcast through donor channels, which further reduced listeners' brand loyalty.

Direct-to-home (DTH) Dish TV connection entered Nepal, with the government granting permissions to six companies to operate the



connections. DTH subscribers could choose channels and receive satellite data through their own personal dish, putting an end to the cable tv technology in Nepal. The DTH used set top boxes, and used digital instead of analogue signals, bringing clarity in both the television quality and shifting the way subscribers used to view tv.

The energy sector suffered a crisis with black-outs and electricity shortfall. The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) tried to promote the '20-80 scheme' for communities to bear 20% of the total cost while the government invested the remaining 80%.

Electrification in southern Lalitpur through a cooperative managed to significantly reduce electricity pilferage and loss. Many rural areas faced darkness, but could get light through the scheme. Villagers managed to cut down on diesel usage, and increasingly used electricity to transport their daily utilities via a ropeway.

The telecommunications sector was poised for takeoff as mobile usage grew, and Nepal was in the cusp of the digital revolution that would transform the economy, politics and society with the advent of smart phones only a year or two away.

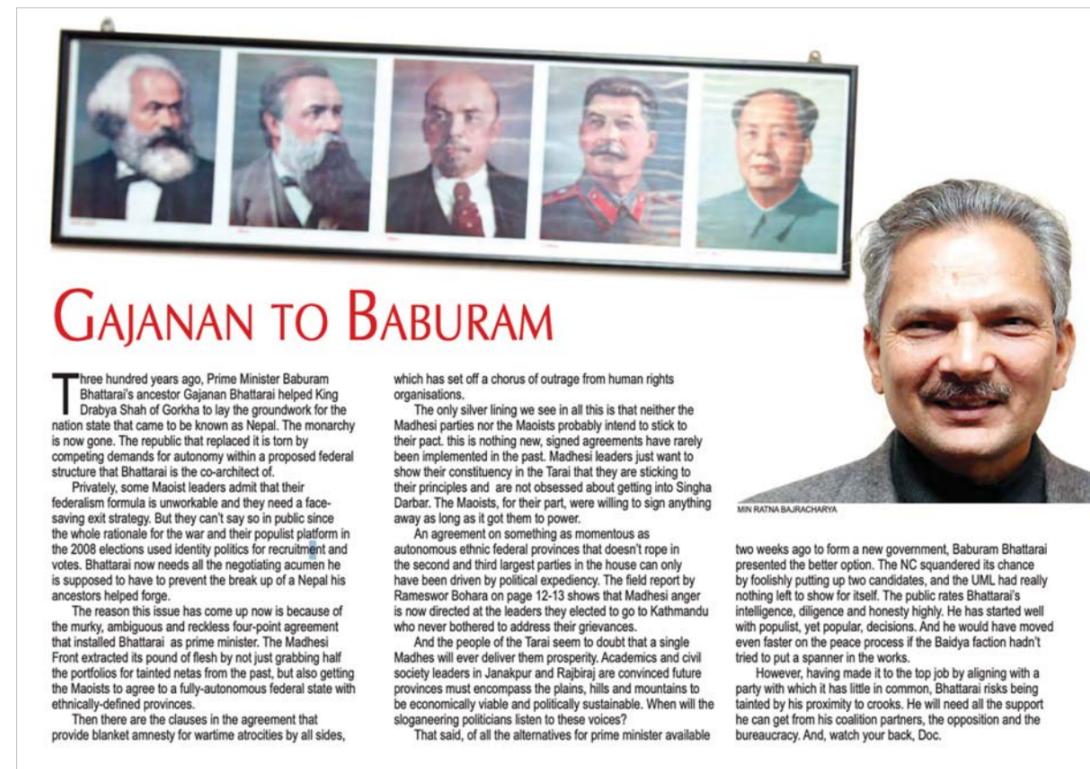
2011

Chief Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai was elected Prime Minister on 29 August 2011 as the leader of the Maoist party which got the Madhesi Alliance vote to reach a majority in Parliament through a controversial four-point agreement. This promised half the ministerial portfolios to the Alliance, declaring general amnesty for wartime atrocities, and a federal state with ethnic provinces that would be fully autonomous.

The editorial in #570, titled 'Gajanan to Baburam' (right), referred to Bhattarai's ancestor who had helped King Drabya Shah to lay the foundations for what came to become the Kingdom of Nepal.

The piece pointed out that all the elements of the agreement were unlikely to be implemented as it did not involve the NC or the UML, and that Madhesi leaders were only trying to prove to their voters that they were sticking to their principles of a Madhes state.

The general feeling was one of



GAJANAN TO BABURAM

Three hundred years ago, Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai's ancestor Gajanan Bhattarai helped King Drabya Shah of Gorkha to lay the groundwork for the nation state that came to be known as Nepal. The monarchy is now gone. The republic that replaced it is torn by competing demands for autonomy within a proposed federal structure that Bhattarai is the co-architect of.

Privately, some Maoist leaders admit that their federalism formula is unworkable and they need a face-saving exit strategy. But they can't say so in public since the whole rationale for the war and their populist platform in the 2008 elections used identity politics for recruitment and votes. Bhattarai now needs all the negotiating acumen he is supposed to have to prevent the break up of a Nepal his ancestors helped forge.

The reason this issue has come up now is because of the murky, ambiguous and reckless four-point agreement that installed Bhattarai as prime minister. The Madhesi Front extracted its pound of flesh by not just grabbing half the portfolios for tainted netas from the past, but also getting the Maoists to agree to a fully-autonomous federal state with ethnically-defined provinces.

Then there are the clauses in the agreement that provide blanket amnesty for wartime atrocities by all sides,

which has set off a chorus of outrage from human rights organisations.

The only silver lining we see in all this is that neither the Madhesi parties nor the Maoists probably intend to stick to their pact. This is nothing new, signed agreements have rarely been implemented in the past. Madhesi leaders just want to show their constituency in the Tarai that they are sticking to their principles and are not obsessed about getting into Singha Darbar. The Maoists, for their part, were willing to sign anything away as long as it got them to power.

An agreement on something as momentous as autonomous ethnic federal provinces that doesn't rope in the second and third largest parties in the house can only have been driven by political expediency. The field report by Rameswor Bohara on page 12-13 shows that Madhesi anger is now directed at the leaders they elected to go to Kathmandu who never bothered to address their grievances.

And the people of the Tarai seem to doubt that a single Madhesi will ever deliver them prosperity. Academics and civil society leaders in Janakpur and Rajbiraj are convinced future provinces must encompass the plains, hills and mountains to be economically viable and politically sustainable. When will the sloganeering politicians listen to these voices?

That said, of all the alternatives for prime minister available

two weeks ago to form a new government, Baburam Bhattarai presented the better option. The NC squandered its chance by foolishly putting up two candidates, and the UML had really nothing left to show for itself. The public rates Bhattarai's intelligence, diligence and honesty highly. He has started well with populist, yet popular, decisions. And he would have moved even faster on the peace process if the Baidya faction hadn't tried to put a spanner in the works.

However, having made it to the top job by aligning with a party with which it has little in common, Bhattarai risks being tainted by his proximity to crooks. He will need all the support he can get from his coalition partners, the opposition and the bureaucracy. And, watch your back, Doc.

Mustang jeep. Some liked what they saw, others saw it as a publicity stunt.

Diwakar Chhetri's front-page cartoon in #569 showed Bhattarai seething in his Mustang as it was stripped for parts by Madhesi leaders who grabbed the seats, steering wheel, and wheels.

Dewan Rai's 'Getting Down to

Prime Minister Dahal had his own plans, he tried to remove Army Chief Rookmangud Katuwal and replace him with a pro-Maoist general. President Ram Baran Yadav overturned that decision, and with a nod from New Delhi got Dahal to resign.

Civilians are the primary victims in most wars, and in the Maoist conflict it is Nepali women who suffered sexual violence. Female guerrillas made up a third of the Maoist militia, but many of them became single mothers after their ex-guerrilla husbands divorced them following the end of the war.

Around 15,000 cases remain unresolved in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP).

The transitional justice process remains flawed, with women having to bear the repercussions of the war at the extreme end.

There were reportedly 1,000 young mothers in the seven UNMIN-supervised camps and 21 sub-camps all over the country. Many women warriors gave birth in camp, and

instead of carrying assault rifles were cradling babies.

In issue #439, 'Children of the Revolution' revealed a former guerilla giving birth to her second child in an UNMIN demobilisation camp, where her first child was born malnourished. Lack of medical facilities made it more difficult for expecting and new mothers.

Many Nepali women were widowed and had to restart their lives post conflict. But, the government in its 2009-10 budget made a proposal to provide Rs50,000 'reward' to a man if he married a war widow.

In response, Mallika Aryal in #470 wrote:

'This is one of the most callous, thoughtless and rash decisions the government of Nepal has taken in recent years. As if women didn't already have enough to struggle against. Marriage is a deeply personal decision, and linking that decision to money demeans women.'

As it turned out, when a war that was fought to liberate women ended, so did the promise of emancipation. Women were fighting for their rights then, and they are still fighting for their rights now.

THE DOCTOR'S CHECKLIST

Prime Minister Bhattarai has his work cut out. Here is his check list in order of priority:

1. Complete the cabinet
2. Complete peace process in 45 days as promised
3. Keep NC and UML happy so they don't throw spanner in works
4. Hand over keys as a symbolic step. But regrouping and compromises on integration will be more difficult to push through
5. Keep one eye on Chairman Dahal, so he doesn't wreck things
6. Back track on amnesty provision on 4-point deal, this will be a major stumbling block with opposition and international community
7. Constitution, take the bull by the horns on ethnic federalism and state structure
8. Show the presence of the state, tackle law and order
9. Improve investment climate, tame unions
10. Hunker down for 18-hour power cuts this winter'

The Ass in the Backside Column saw what was really going on behind the scenes, and had some advice:

'It is becoming clearer by the day why the Madhesi and the Dhotighaut Cluster decided to back the gov't. The main bone of contention is not really about portfolios, it's more about who gets to be Deputy Prime Minister. There are so many aspirants for the post that it looks set to be a cabinet with more deputy prime ministers than ministers. To break the deadlock, the Ass would like to make a humble suggestion:

- Deputy Prime Minister-in-Chief
- Assistant Chief Deputy Prime Minister
- Associate Deputy Prime Minister
- Senior Assistant Deputy Prime Minister
- Joint Deputy Prime Minister
- Senior Assistant Joint Deputy Chief Prime Minister'

2012

2012 was declared 'Invest in Nepal Year' and it followed Tourism Year in 2011 which increased visitor numbers by 20%. Tourism was the largest contributor of FDI inflow in Nepal occupying nearly one-third of all investments.

It was followed by the service and manufacturing industry. A Guest Column by Siddhant Raj Pandey in #585 put forward a global glance of investments in Nepal, and highlighted the importance of clear policies and its implementation in Nepal.

Tourist arrivals by air in Nepal increased by 10% from 2011, totaling 598,204. The only international airport was deemed to be congested, indicating potential of a new international airport for Nepal. In 2012, there were 28 international airlines connecting Kathmandu with the world, with other carriers seeking slots.

There were issues of poor quality and expensive ground handling, raising concerns from international airlines. International airline operators raised issues of traffic congestion, landing slots, the shabby condition of the terminal among others.

'Nepal by air' in issue #625 (pictured) noted the government should have attracted new carriers and retained existing ones by consistent policies and rational pricing.

'Eye in the Sky' in #604 highlighted the important role of pilots in spotting natural disasters from the sky. The story elaborated on how Captain Alexander Maximov managed to spot the rock fall on Annapurna IV that set off a flashflood on the Seti River and warned Pokhara airport which flashed it to FM radio stations - allowing many people to flee to higher ground.

Still, 70 people were killed, among them seven foreign tourists. The flood was ascribed to permafrost melting on the west face of Annapurna IV, and plummeting the rock face to the glacier below. Our report warned that with global warming, such disasters would be more common in the coming decades.



After a year of Baburam Bhattarai's prime ministership, there was ennui setting in, as we wrote in this Editorial:

'We have been arguing here against replacing Baburam Bhattarai as prime minister mainly because he seems the least incompetent of the politicians on offer. Pushpa Kamal Dahal has a track record for being super-ambitious and highly unpredictable. The UML and NC may have democratic minded candidates, but they have been tried and tested, and found wanting.'

In the public perception, Bhattarai still has the aura of being someone with intellect and integrity despite the thoroughly kleptocratic coalition he leads. None of the sleaze seems to rub off on the Teflon Man, though.

His overnight trips to stay and eat with Dalit families in Jumla and Chepang families in Chitwan are expensive populist stunts, but seem to go down well with the public. His demolition of half of Kathmandu has raised hackles, but also bolstered the perception that he is a doer, because he has sent bulldozers tearing through even the property of the rich and powerful.

Prime Minister Dr Baburam Bhattarai, PhD, is obviously a genius. But we wish he had used his considerable intellect to control this haemorrhage of the treasury, and invest the funds in cost-effective social welfare. Instead, he is presiding over the plunder of the state. 🇳🇵

2013

By 2013, the optimism after the ceasefire seven years earlier had more or less disappeared. It was clear that the trust the Nepali people had put in the Maoists in 2008 to lead the country to a new direction had not been realised.

Mohan Baidya breaking away from the Maoists the previous year had weakened the party. In March, results of the annual Himalmedia Public Opinion Poll showed that the apathy, indifference, disenchantment, and cynicism with political parties and their leaders had grown, with more than half the respondents saying they did not trust the crop of political leaders at the time.

That same month, when it became clear that then Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai's government could not hold the second Constituent Assembly elections on time, the parties handed over power to a transitional government led by Chief Justice Khil Raj Regmi, who became the Chairman of the Interim Election Council of Ministers.

With the pesky problem of governance out of the way, Nepal's leaders set their sights on the 2013 race. We wrote that the election would be a referendum on federalism. Indeed, while the Maoists and fringe parties campaigned on ethnicity-based federalism, the NC and UML were against the idea.

Public opinion polls over the years had also shown that Nepalis in general were against the idea of ethnicity-based federalism. Our Editorial after the election in 2013:

'The people are interested more in bread and butter issues like health, education, jobs, and roads. They want accountable leaders with integrity, they are less than enthusiastic about secularism, and they think federalism based on single ethnicity is a bad idea. Even people from the indigenous communities and the Tarai felt that way, but the Maoists and the Madhesi parties went ahead and made those issues their main plank showing just how out of touch they were.'

Meanwhile, leaders engaged with voters amid a changing media landscape: it was the first election in which they used social media to campaign with various degrees of success.

Six months after assuming power, Regmi's bureaucratic government conducted the election on 19 November, during which almost 80% of registered voters cast their ballots to elect a new Constituent Assembly. We wrote in our editorial as the results of the 2013 polls began to trickle in:

'Nepal's silent majority has spoken, it has rejected violence and given moderate centrist parties one more chance to prove themselves. The high turnout was a strong message to the boycotting CPN-M and support for the traditional moderate parties was an unequivocal rejection of the politics of ethnicity of the non-performing UCPN (M) and Madhesi parties.'

The Maoists, who had won in a landslide in 2008 trailed far behind the NC and the UML. The Maoists lost races in crucial constituencies like Pushpa Kamal Dahal in Kathmandu-10, to which they responded by crying foul.

By year-end, the NC and the UML were tasked with sharing power and writing a new constitution.

We wrote: 'In their euphoria of victory and overblown vermilion rallies, the NC and UML may think that the table has turned and they can go back to their winner-takes-all behaviour. The first test of whether they turned a new leaf will be if they resort to their dog-eat-dog rivalry in the formation of a new government in the coming weeks.'

And that is exactly what happened. 🇳🇵



TARETE



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2014

On 18 April, a mammoth avalanche that fell off the West Shoulder of Mt Everest claimed the lives of 16 Nepali guides fixing ropes on the Khumbu Icefall for 31 expeditions during the 2014 season. The serac fell on Icefall Doctors making their way to Camp 1 at the beginning of the season.

On 2 August, the whole side of a mountain fell on the homes of the residents of Jure along the Arniko Highway, taking the lives of 156 people and destroying houses. The Bhote Kosi was blocked, the Kodari Highway and two hydropower plants were submerged.

In his column Strictly Business, Ashutosh Tiwari pointed out the human role in the death toll in 'Coping Mechanisms':

"For a fee, unelected local politicians can give you permissions to rent bulldozers to flatten sections of the hills, to mine sand from the rivers and to extract water from the ground to sell commercially, to construct hotels near the river banks, to let settlements grow into a bazaar, and to look the other way when it comes to enforcing building codes.

So, when disasters strike, no one can really be held locally accountable for having let the risks dangerously multiply on the side of people and property."

After the Everest avalanche, expeditions abandoned their climbs, and the government raised the insurance coverage of high altitude guides and support staff to Rs1.5million. Some called for a moratorium on expeditions for the season, but the Ministry of Tourism urged teams to resume work after a week of mourning.

Worryingly, overcrowding by inexperienced tourists is rampant and the Khumbu Icefall gets ever more dangerous due to climate change. Duty to their profession and clients clouds the judgement of some companies.

Wrote Norwegian climber Jon Gangdal:

"Every expedition leader (including myself) has made decisions for the progress or profit of the expedition.

They give bonuses for more loads, fixed ropes and high altitude metres climbed. But I haven't yet seen an expedition leader rewarding a Sherpa for saying: "Sorry, Sir, it's not the time to go up now, I have a really bad feeling about this." They do it for their families, and they may say "Yes" when they mean "No."

Welsh Mountaineer David Durkan wrote an angry piece about mountaineering having become a watered-down farce where Sherpas take most of the risk and clients get all the glory:

"The Nepali high altitude worker works hard, suffers and is paid poorly, and as we have seen, he dies. The clients return home as heroes to write articles, books, appear on tv, hold lectures, receive sponsorships and even become experts on Himalayan mountaineering."

The day after the Jure landslide, Narendra Modi visited Nepal and began his address to Parliament in accentless Nepali – elevating Nepal-India relations to a new level. (He undid this in 2016 with a six-month border blockade.)



2015

Of all the 25 years Nepali Times has been in print, 2015 is the year that stands out as being most eventful.

It started off with the paper's coverage of National Earthquake Safety Day on 15 January with an Editorial titled 'Preparing To Be Prepared' which in a way prophesied the disaster that was to strike three months later.

In mid-March at the height of the tourist season, an Airbus 330 suffered a runway excursion while landing in Kathmandu with its tail sticking out into the runway. The plane could not be moved for four days and 80,000 passengers were stranded in Kathmandu and in airports abroad.

In Kathmandu itself, the Constituent Assembly was stalemated over the draft Constitution and the disagreement over how many provinces the country should be carved into and on what basis.

The Maoists were still insisting on ethnic

demarcation, and the Madhes Movement wanted autonomy for a province spanning the entire Tarai from east to west.

Just then, on 25 April at 11:56AM an earthquake of 7.8 magnitude epicentred in

Gorkha district shook Kathmandu and the surroundings. Nearly 9,000 people were killed, the entire village of Langtang was buried by an avalanche killing 300 people, and another 16 people were killed in an avalanche that struck Mt Everest Base Camp.

A fold-out page 1 of Nepali Times carried the photo of six-month-old Sonish Awal who was rescued after 24 hours buried under the rubble of a collapsed home in Bhaktapur (pictured, above).

Along with the death and destruction were stories of rebirth, hope and communities coming together to help those in need.

In 2015 Nepal was rocked not just by geotectonics, but also geopolitics. The Constitution was promulgated by an elected assembly on 20 September which did not meet the demands of the Madhesi parties, and this displeased New Delhi.

The ensuing Indian blockade of the border devastated the economy. Earthquake relief material was stuck, Nepal ran out of fuel and food.

People went back to cooking by firewood and riding bicycles. China gave token help, but it did not amount to much.

The blockade lasted five months and was finally lifted in January 2016.

Excerpt of a report 'Earthquake from Above' in the 1-8 May 2015 issue:

"It had been an unseasonably cold and rainy Saturday morning. Twelve of us from the staff of Nepali Times were on a hiking retreat on a hill overlooking the city.

The sky was overcast, and we were disappointed not to have a view of the Himalayas to the north. Some of us looked down at the capital spreading out in the bowl-shaped valley below and talked about its rapid, haphazard growth.

Suddenly there was a big jolt and we could barely stand. Puffs, then billows, of dust rose from various parts of the city, within minutes shrouding the whole valley in a brown blanket. Bhaktapur looked like it was being swallowed by a sand storm. Kathmandu disappeared.

Our sense of shock turned to fear as we thought of our families down below. We hugged each other, some of us crying. We reached for our phones. The lines were down.

We ran down to the car park at the foot of the hill, and headed into town. On the road we skirted fallen masonry and tilted buildings. People were clustered in open spaces or in the middle of the streets, as far as possible from anything that might collapse. In front of a hospital, we saw patients lying on mattresses set out on the sidewalk.

Hundreds of thousands of people in Kathmandu and surrounding areas spent Saturday night on the streets as Kathmandu was rocked constantly by 50 aftershocks.

Yet, there is no sign of overt panic, people gathered water bottles and sleeping bags and helped each other."



The lonely struggle against tyranny

Political parties have finally decided to act against Lokman Singh Karki, but only to save their own skins

In December last year, social and political activists, journalists, lawyers and a few politicians started meeting regularly in Kathmandu to discuss the new parallel power centre that had emerged in Nepal. They strategised over coffee about how to deal with the Commission on the Investigation for the Abuse of Authority (CIAA) and its chief, Lokman Singh Karki, who seemed to be an unstoppable force threatening the basic tenets of democracy.



ONE TO MANY Bidushi Dhungel

At that time, people spoke his name in hushed tones, the walls had ears and there was the threat that Karki would slap his 'zero-pane' (the 13-page asset declaration form) that was used to persecute opponents. On Aryal's case for Karki's impeachment had been dismissed by the court and while Aryal

stood fearless in filing an appeal, there was a palpable feeling of dread. Other efforts, like Sunam Shrestha's appeal under the Right to Information Act to release property details of the CIAA chief went some way in garnering media attention and breaking the culture of silence on Karki's regime.

But matters only came to head after May. While Kanak Mani Dixit's arrest energised sections of civil society to overcome its fear, a welcome change of guard at the Supreme Court propelled Chief Justice Sushila Karki as the most integral protagonist in this saga.

Then Govinda KC began his eighth fast unto death demanding Karki's impeachment. The street movement around the crusading physician increased pressure on Parliament and politicians to act. An alliance coalesced around KC's demands bringing together activists like Jwan Chhetri, Jagannath Lamichhane, members of Bibekshel Nepali party and medical students at TUH. The role of investigative

journalists Krishna Gyawali, Deepak Dahal, Shiva Gaurile and Hari Bahadur Thapa were central to exposing malpractices of the CIAA chief, providing fodder for daily headlines. For a couple of weeks, the media, courts and the street supported each other to highlight the CIAA's excesses.

But one by one, the media was silenced into submission through pressure on publishers. Setopati and other digital portals stood their ground at great risk to themselves.

But it was the search for three members of parliament to register an impeachment motion that exposed the real character of Nepal's political class. It was difficult to find even three MPs out of 595 to take a stand against Karki and challenge their party whips. Like everything else in Nepal, a 'consensus' among party honchos was necessary. Despite our door-to-door lobbying with 200 MPs over a two-month period, it was futile. When 200 MPs confirmed they would attend interactions to brainstorm about impeachment, only 15 would

fray of the UML party.

The year saw the notorious rise and ignominious fall of Lokman Singh Karki, chieftain of the Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority (CIAA). Nepal's most corrupt and ruthless bureaucrat was put in charge of the country's anti-corruption agency.

Karki went on a full scale witch hunt, extorting and blackmailing businessmen, bureaucrats, civil society, lawyers, and the media. Himalmedia's own publishers were jailed or left the country to escape arrest on trumped up charges by a man who came to be known as 'Mr Lockman'.

Nepali Times translated a commentary from Setopati by Ameet Dhakal, which has lessons for today's politicians:

'Historically, whenever Nepal's political class has failed to defend democracy, it has been the media that has had to come to the rescue. The head of the CIAA has tried with all his might to silence the media. He has overstepped his jurisdiction, and mobilised other agencies of government to gag the press ... Why isn't there a debate in Parliament about Karki's anti-constitutional activities? Remember, Nepal's political map will change either through rebellion or widespread hopelessness. Either way, it will sweep you away.'

By October, the very politicians who appointed Karki felt he was getting too big for his boots, and sacked him after threatening impeachment. The legacy of that tyranny can still be felt in Nepal: today we have mini-Lokmans populating all three levels of government. 🇳🇵

2016

In January, the blockade was lifted much to the relief of Nepalis. Pushpa Kamal Dahal, prime minister for the second time, travelled to India to patch up relations with Narendra Modi.

2016 was also the 20th anniversary of the start of the Maoist conflict in 1996, and it was ten years after the end of the war. Nepali Times marked the anniversaries throughout the year with coverage of those who were caught up in the conflict to find out what had become of them: photographer Dinesh Shrestha published pictures of the Long March of Maoist leaders during the conflict, an editorial looked back at Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai photoshopping his own revolutionary past, how survivors and families of the victims coped with the grief, bereavement and suffering.

The year was also one in which Nepal took a Great Leap Forward in inclusive leadership: the country's President, Chief Justice and Speaker of Parliament were all women. We have regressed since then, and former President Bidya Devi Bhandari has ignored critics to rejoin the political

2017

The first local-level election after the promulgation of the 2015 Constitution was held under a Sher Bahadur Deuba-led government in three phases on 14 May, 28 June and 18 September.

Nepal's first party-based local elections were held in 1959, and the last successful local election before the federal system was in 1997, soon after the armed Maoist insurgency began.



Ahead of the first phase of the polls in May 2017, Nepali Times traced the history of local level elections in Nepal, and prepared a Village Development Committee map of the 1997 local election results (above).

From May to September, municipal and ward-level leaders were elected to 753 local units. Nepal has had one more election after 2017, and the general consensus has been that the performance of municipalities has exceeded expectations, but the same cannot be said of provincial governments.

Dasain in 2017 fell between the end of the local election and the upcoming general election. We wrote:

'We are now finally nearing the end of a two-decade-long political transition. The peace process has dragged on, and we waited years haggling over the kind of federalism and the names of provinces and their borders, only to find out now that all the people wanted were jobs at home.. affordable education and medical facilities, electricity and fuel, and to be left alone to pursue their own happiness.'

Provincial and parliamentary elections were held on 26 November and 7 December. The UML and Maoists had formed an electoral alliance with the intention of merging after the polls, which the NC, RPP and Madhes-based parties countered with their own 'democratic alliance'.

The UML and Maoists combined to form Nepal's largest party, the Nepal Communist Party, in 2018 but the merger would be short-lived. The UML consequently swept the polls, and K P Oli went on to be the prime minister in a left-led government. The end of the election operationalised a federal, secular, democratic Nepal.

The work was then cut out for the newly-elected leadership to govern properly. An excerpt from a column after the election in December 2017:

'There is a Constitution to implement, hundreds of new laws and regulations to enact under it, constitutional principles of local government to be defended, inter-community relations to be normalised, inter-relationships within the new state structure to be defined and rationalised, and a confident new foreign policy put in place, especially to tackle the two ascendant neighbours.'

Nepal also elected leaders to the seven provincial assemblies for the first time in 2017. However, despite Nepalis by and large welcoming a federal system, some felt that federalism was wasteful and should be scrapped, a sentiment that pro-monarchist parties and the RSP have now capitalised on.

Various studies and surveys however show that Nepalis understand the ineffectiveness of the provinces lies in the federal leadership reluctant to devolve power and decentralise. 🇳🇵

2018

The year 2018 marked a disastrous year for air safety with the US-Bangla crash at Kathmandu airport on 12 March. The tragedy pinpointed concerns about aviation safety and governance in Nepal, even though this particular accident was blamed on a mentally disturbed captain. The crash killed 51 people, most of them recent medical graduate students. The air crash tarnished Nepal's aviation industry and its international image even more, with the European Union

(EU) continuing to blacklist the country's airlines.

Migrant workers frequently travel to and from Nepal, and many migrants faced difficulties in traveling, due to expensive tickets, and cheating by middlemen and manpower companies among others. The safety of migrant workers could be ensured by airlines creating a favourable environment for Nepali workers through alliances and corporate social responsibility. Upasana Khadka in #907 wrote:

'Airlines could set aside some tickets every week for stranded migrants, provide last minute unsold tickets for those who are in dire need of help. These could be based on referrals from embassies and rescue organisations.'

Airlines can be an important and natural partner in efforts to promote safe migration by moving from a transactional relationship towards social responsibility.'



Kathmandu hosted the XII World Congress on Mountain Medicine 21-24 November. The Himalayan Rescue Association (HRA) established an aid post in Pheriche in the 1970s,

which helped save people suffering from altitude sickness. Mountain medicine expert Peter Hackett in #935 emphasised the importance of mountain medicine and the role of medical personnel, researchers and aid posts in preventing fatalities.

Before the advent of modern transportation, no one could travel high enough fast enough to get into much trouble. Altitude illness is therefore mainly a problem of modern times. Nepal has now developed a large cadre of young physicians specialising in high-altitude medicine.

Mentored by Buddha Basnyat, these young doctors are carrying on the tradition of quality care of victims of altitude illness, research on causes and treatments, and developing systems of administering care to diverse populations.

Altitude sickness also became a concern for Indian pilgrims travelling to Mansorovar. Nepalganj became the gateway for Indian pilgrims travelling to Kailash Mansarovar in Tibet via Hilsa. Many of them use the Nepalganj route to visit Kailash, boosting the hospitality and aviation sector in Nepalganj.

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) meeting was hosted by Nepal in August 2018. The fourth edition of the international convention witnessed the member countries visit Nepal and encourage economic cooperation and connectivity. Matters of hydropower and joint military exercises were discussed, and member countries agreed to cooperate regionally beyond bilateralism. 🇳🇵

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घाम-पानी छेतछ,
१० वर्ष टिक्छ

चर्को घामबाट बचाउँछ

मुसलधारै वर्षाबाट जोगाउँछ

१० वर्ष वारेन्टी

2019

Geopolitics took a front seat in 2019. Leaders of both of Nepal's neighbours paid high level visit in the same year. S Jaishankar, the minister for foreign affairs of India, visited in August 2019, for the Nepal-India joint commission meeting. His visit was considered crucial in improving ties between both Nepal and India, which were strained after his previous visit in 2015 which led to the border blockade.

Editorial in #974: 'Nepal's strategy in dealing with its larger neighbour should be guided by pragmatism, and not petulant stubbornness. We should do our homework before negotiations and work in the spirit of give and take.'

Chinese President Xi Jinping



visited Kathmandu in October 2019, the first by a Chinese president in 23 years. The visit was considered of great importance with projects including BRI discussed. Twenty agreements were signed, including 18 MoUs and two letters of exchange. Six years later, there has not been much progress on

any of these – largely due to political instability and lethargy in Nepal.

Bhaskar Koirala in #981 wrote: 'One of the issues that loomed large for Nepal during this historic Xi visit (and will continue to reverberate) is how the country is going to navigate between the two large overarching geopolitical constructs of the day—the BRI and the Indo-Pacific

Strategy. How will Nepal balance BRI and IPS?'

Nepal does have a non-alignment policy, but the movement is moot. Balancing between the two large neighbours has always seemed a difficult task for Nepal, and depending on the ruling party in Kathmandu, was seen to be leaning towards one or the other.

Relations with India took a dip in 2019 after India published a map including the east side of the Kali river, which has historically been a part of Nepal. Nationalist outrage spread like wildfire in Nepal, and PM Oli cashed in on this by making the map that included Limpiyadhura official. Not to be outdone, the NC, which was in opposition then, also mobilised its student union to protest outside the Indian Embassy.

The editorial in #984 conceded that India was acting like a Big Brother, but advised Nepalis to be more concerned and care about their boundaries, only then will the neighbours will respect it.

A rare protest against China also erupted when the India-China joint communique on Lipu Lekh



was released in 2015. Meanwhile, Nepal's remote border districts bordering China were finally being connected to the highway network. Although this brought relief to locals, there were concerns about how it would impact the fragile culture and ecology of highlands like Dolpo (pictured).

Nepali Times also carried the popular Miss Moti cartoon series by Kripa Joshi every week with a message against body shaming, for tolerance, and respect for nature.

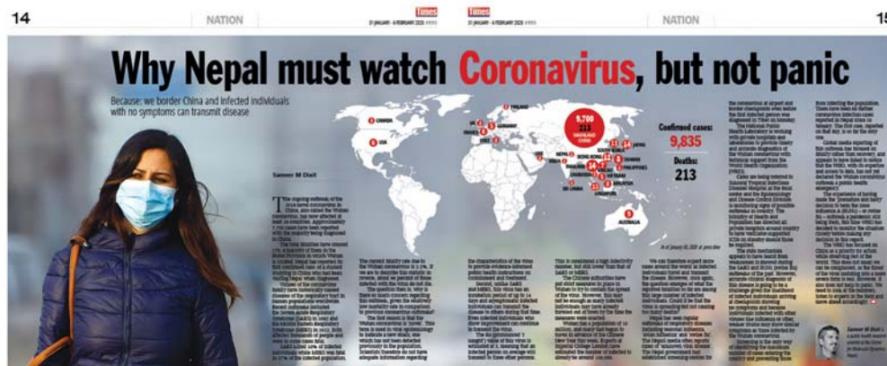
2020

The world before and after Covid-19 are two different realities. The pandemic was a Hollywood dystopian nightmare and changed how people live and work, what we eat, and how we travel, our social dynamics and technological leaps. It also exposed or, in some cases, aggravated pre-existing inequalities.

While the exact origin of the virus, which was first reported on a small scale in November 2019 from Wuhan remains contentious, Covid-19 was the latest in a long line of infections that jumped from animals to people, establishing the connection between new and emerging diseases with the relentless extraction of natural resources. It also widened the gap between the rich and poor countries.

Countries sealed their borders and locked their citizens in the confines of their homes, but they could not do the same to the novel coronavirus. The world is a global village, a wily virus detected in one part of the world rapidly spread to every known corner in a matter of days. It continues to this day with a new sub-variant of the Covid-19 being detected every couple of months.

After the shutdowns, the repatriation of



Nepali migrant workers became a priority (right). They had lost their jobs in destination countries and had no way of coming back.

There were some Nepali embassies in West Asia which worked overtime to bring workers back home safely. Migrants from India walked for days only to be stopped at the border. Desperate, some even swam across the Mahakali River to get home.

Before long, hospitals were overflowing with patients and there were not enough supplies or staff. The Nepali diaspora sent home money in record numbers, they also flew equipment including medical supplies such as oxygen cylinders.

The poorest were the hardest hit. The lockdowns meant they had no source of income, and their health and nutrition were directly compromised. This was even more acute during the second wave caused by the more aggressive Delta variant. Even younger



people were hospitalised, and the need for a vaccine, especially for the elderly and people with comorbidities, was at its peak.

Improved hygiene and mask wearing saved many lives. With no vehicular or industrial

pollution across the Subcontinent, Nepal's air was clean again. Mt Everest was visible from Kathmandu, Abhushan Gautam's iconic photograph was on Nepali Times #1011.

Vaccine diplomacy came into play. COVAX, a global vaccine initiative, was at least able to deliver the first batch of vials to the neediest, showing that multilateralism was still relevant. Even so, some are more equal than others.

Our very first coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic (pictured) by research scientist Sameer Mani Dixit was dated 29 January 2020, when the global death toll was at 213 and a little over 9,000 cases. By the end of the pandemic, it had claimed at least 7,010,681 lives.

Covid-19 has had other insidious impacts on society, ranging from undermining previous gains on public health and poverty to societal breakdown, mental health, and racism. The pandemic touched every corner of public and private life and reshaped the world.

Covid-19 also brought the world together. Never before had there been a quicker breakthrough in terms of vaccine development as countries with the most resources facilitated the process. Nepal became one of the biggest contributors to the Covid recovery trial which found that a cheap steroid dexamethasone was the most effective drug for the treatment of hospitalised Covid patients.

Just five years later, the world is more polarised than ever before, Covid is still lurking amidst vaccine denial in the US, people are more intolerant towards differences, countries are pouring money into wars and moving away from humanitarian causes.

We have forgotten how the pandemic turned the world upside down, and that it can happen again.

2021



COPOUT at COP26

Sonia Awale
The COP26 climate jamboree ends in Glasgow on Friday, and already it looks like the best world governments are prepared to offer in emission cuts is not enough to stave off a global environmental catastrophe.

Ensure all vulnerable people are protected from climate change by 2030
In Kathmandu, environmental activist Bhuban Tulethar welcomed the new targets, saying they were "ambitious but doable", but ones which will require a serious review of our normal development pathway.

Amrit Nakarmi, an adviser at the Energy Development Council, prepared the long-term strategy report, and says Nepal is unlikely to meet the targets without funding. "We contribute only 0.5% of total global carbon emissions and even within that only 30% is anthropogenic, 30% is natural and the remaining 50% is

Nepal could save at least \$33 billion a year by replacing cooking gas imports with electricity. What Nepalis have paid as 'pollution tax' for every litre of petrol or diesel at gas stations in the last decade now totals \$10 billion. This money could be used to buy electric public buses, and increasing the petroleum excise duty could

weather this year, droughts and floods destroyed crops, lack of water is creating climate refugees, wildfires have become nationwide," Upadhyay adds. "The question is what are we doing to address these challenges?"
After overdoing on climate news for two weeks just to be side-lined until the next COP, we



On midnight 22 May 2021, then-president Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved Parliament at the behest of UML Chair K P Sharma Oli after he failed to be reappointed prime minister.

Oli had previously also dissolved Parliament in December 2020, but the Supreme Court overturned his decision, calling it unconstitutional. The short-lived Nepal Communist Party that merged the UML and Maoists thus split, creating an irreconcilable rift within UML bigwigs Oli and Madhav Kumar Nepal.

All of this happened while Nepal was in the throes of the deadly Delta variant, and 150 Nepalis were dying every day. We wrote in 2021:

'The reshuffle highlighted the government's inability to focus attention on protecting Nepalis with vaccines while the virus is ravaging the countryside, and addressing the loss of jobs during the lockdown.'

NC president Sher Bahadur Deuba

consequently led a five-party alliance of 149 MPs -- from the NC, the Maoist Centre as well breakaway factions of the JSP and the UML -- to file a writ petition after President Bhandari thwarted claims from both Oli and an opposition alliance of a House majority to form the next government.

In July, the Supreme Court once again overturned Oli's decision and reinstated the House of Representatives, ordering Deuba be installed as prime minister. The Maoist Centre backed Deuba, making way for a new coalition

government which Deuba would be in charge of until the next general election.

Meanwhile, UML's Nepal faction backed Deuba for prime minister, which became the straw that broke the camel's back for Oli and Nepal's relationship. By August, the Nepal faction had broken away from Oli to form its own CPN-Unified Socialists. Mahanta Thakur also split from the Janta Samajwadi Party to form his Loktantrik Samajwadi Party (LSP).

In the months that followed, the major parties began to prepare for their general conventions

and the upcoming election, as the Unified Socialists and Maoists -- which had become smaller parties -- struggled to find their footing in the new political landscape.

Meanwhile, political infighting and reshuffling of power in government had brought governance to a standstill amidst an ongoing pandemic. This post break-up era of politics was the beginning of the musical chairs of coalition governments and premiership between K P Oli, Sher Bahadur Deuba, and Pushpa Kamal Dahal that we are still going through in 2025.

2022

The 2022 election year began with the Deuba-led coalition government ratifying the much-delayed \$500 million MCC grant for transmission lines to distribute and export power across Nepal despite fierce opposition from the Maoist Centre and the Unified Socialists.

The row threatened the Deuba-Dahal-Nepal alliance. Dahal and Nepal ultimately agreed to support its ratification on condition that it be accompanied by an 'interpretative declaration' addressing concerns about the project, the viability of which was questioned by experts:

...even as the declaration seems to have kept the governing coalition intact and ratified the MCC, experts have questioned the validity of such a document. Others have called the document redundant, and that it is merely a face-saving exercise for the Maoists and Unified Socialist leadership.'

Then the three main parties began wheeling and dealing to make and break alliances in preparation of the upcoming local and federal elections. In May, as Nepal's established parties battled it out in local elections, independent candidates won the mayor races in major cities like rapper-turned-politician Balen Shah in Kathmandu.

A collective of young professionals came together to form the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) under the leadership of former tv personality Rabi Lamichhane, who contested the November 2022 election on a platform of anti-establishment and anti-corruption.

The NC led in the polls with the UML second, the Maoists came a distant third, while Madhav Kumar Nepal's Unified Socialists was unable to scrape together enough votes to be recognised as a national party. The RSP emerged as the fourth largest party in Parliament with 21 MPs, and Lamichhane would go on to become Home Minister.

Numerous independents also bagged direct seats. We reported as the votes were being counted:



'Although these numbers may look like the big parties are still in control, the electorate has sent a clear message by elevating the independent RSP as a national party in Parliament with more than 1 million votes. With its 7 change-minded MPs, the RSP will have clout in the federal Parliament — a remarkable feat considering the party was only formed six months ago.'

The RSP's success was a reflection of the expectations of Nepali voters in young technocrats to change the nature of politics and governance of the country.

Three years after the 2022 election, Lamichhane is in custody for his involvement in a cooperatives scam, and the technocratic party seems to be bogged down in the same swamp it vowed to clean up.

Meanwhile, the same could not be said about the inclusion of women and minority communities in governance. Top leadership once again denied female leaders tickets to contest direct elections, preferring to fulfil the 33% Constitutional quota by nominating women through the PR list.

After the results came in, the pre-election Deuba-Dahal alliance fell apart, and Dahal formed a coalition government with UML and RSP as his biggest partners — even though the NC had emerged as the largest party in Parliament. But that was before Oli pulled the rug from under the coalition barely a year later.

2023

2023 was the year of scandals. A new scam was exposed by investigative journalists seemingly almost every week.

In March, investigative reporter Devendra Bhattarai broke the story in Kantipur that linked bureaucrats and politicians to human traffickers in a scam to provide false papers to Nepalis so they could migrate to the United States as Bhutan refugees.

Former home minister Bal Krishna Khand of the NC and former deputy prime minister Top Bahadur Rayamajhi of the UML were among those arrested for their role in the scam. They implicated other senior NC leaders.

Elsewhere, the CIB recommended that the government prosecute those implicated in parcelling out nationalised real estate in Baluwatar. Those involved included land revenue officials, party leaders, bureaucrats, ministers, as well as former prime ministers Babauram Bhattarai and Madhav Kumar Nepal.

Notable Nepali figures including Bhatbhateni Supermarket owner Min Bahadur Gurung, as well as officials of the Land Revenue Office were arrested for their involvement in the scam, but Bhattarai and Nepal were spared.

Then in July, the Department of Revenue raided the cargo terminal at Kathmandu airport and seized 61kg of gold being smuggled in from Hong Kong hidden inside brake shoes



of two-wheelers, making it the biggest haul of contraband gold in Nepal's history at the time.

Nepal Police arrested customs officials, Chinese and Indian nationals, and middlemen. Top politicians including former Maoist minister Barshaman Pun, former speaker Onsari Gharti Magar, the family of former vice-president Nanda Kishor Pun, and Maoist Centre vice-chair Krishna Bahadur Mahara and his son were implicated.

Investigative journalists then uncovered Mahara pressuring officials to release the gold for auction. Mahara, who evaded police, would be arrested from Kapilvastu in March 2024.

In October, arrest warrants were issued for numerous individuals embezzling deposits from cooperatives across the country to fund business ventures. Then Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane was among those accused of defrauding Nepalis of millions by diverting deposits to fund Galaxy TV, of which he was co-founder before he entered politics.

Lamichhane initially transferred the CIB chief investigating the case. His party eventually exited the coalition government, and Lamichhane has at present been stripped of his lawmaker status, and remains in custody pending investigation.

The scandals exposed systemic corruption and rot at the top of Nepali politics, bureaucracy, and business, but also spotlighted the role of investigative journalists and a free press in holding truth to power.

We wrote after the fake refugee scam and details of the Lalita Niwas land grab emerged in 2023:

'It was the media that first exposed the fake refugee scam and has been uncovering some of the sordid details in the Baluwatar land scam. The Nepal Police and the CIB also appear to have been given a free hand in pursuing the cases...it could also be argued that the scandals have been exposed and investigated precisely because Nepal has a free media, functioning rule of law and independent investigations.'

2024

Times 20 AUGUST 2024 #1237

NEPAL'S WOMEN EXCEL IN SPORTS IN 2024

Female athletes represented Nepal on the world stage this year despite lack of investment and government support

Shirshi Karki

Ahead of the final SAFF Women's Championship match between Nepal and Bangladesh in October, the All Nepal Football Association (ANFA) had to take most of its players off the field to attend to the 15,000 capacity. Thousands queued up for hours to see the match, and more than 1 million people tuned in to watch the game live on YouTube, marking most viewership ever recorded in Nepal's sports history.

The women's team lost that final match to Bangladesh, but the spirit and skill the Nepalis displayed showed a belated spotlight on Nepal's female athletes.

In 2024, athletes in other sports besides football showed similar performance on the world stage, and few attended the events in record numbers to cheer them on.

In March, para-taekwondo player Palesha Govardhan won gold during the Asian Paralympic qualification rounds, advancing to the 2024 summer Paralympic games in Paris, where she won the bronze in September.

Govardhan is Nepal's first ever Paralympic medalist, and the first athlete ever from Nepal to bring home a competitive medal in the history of the Olympic Games.

In August, Nepal hosted the 2024 CCA Women's Volleyball Challenge Cup where the national volleyball team was placed second, losing the final match to India.

Then in November, the Nepal U-19 women's cricket team defeated the UAE at the Asia Qualifiers, advancing to their first ever ICC U-19 Women's T20 World Cup beginning in January next year.

This year, athletes from Sikkim, Bihar and other states, most notably playing first among women at the 19th Asian Taekwondo in November (page 12).

Nepali women have been performing exceptionally well across many sports events both individually and as teams, and national volleyball player Suman Chaudhary. "And as our games get better, our quality of life also begins to improve."

Most Nepali athletes attribute their success to teamwork, dedication and drive that government support. The Ministry of Youth and Sports in Kathmandu is excited because it is



Bangladesh star 11 opens Nepal's goal in the SAFF Women's Championship final in Kathmandu, October.

among those that have the smallest annual budget.

In fact, Nepal's leaders have been too busy with their own power play to pay attention to the development of sports in Nepal.

"The least possible in the 19th Nepal National Games, planned for 17-26 November in Kathmandu, but could not be held. Officials have been busy about the moment."

Some athletes are quick to take credit for outstanding performances, but do not provide athletes with adequate support, and there is even less of that for female sportspeople.

What is surprising is that Nepali women athletes have performed well despite poor state backing. The national budget this year allocated \$6.3 billion to the Ministry of Youth and Sports, \$400



For a celebration, Palesha Govardhan (left) and Shirshi Karki (right) are being hoisted after the 2024 Asian Taekwondo Games.

million of which was set aside for the National Games.

While sports in general gets the short end of the stick, female athletes are even more left out. Some of Nepal's notable athletes in cricket, football, volleyball, and taekwondo are quick to talk about the state of women's sport in Nepal at the Kathmandu Centre earlier this month.

They discussed what her parents women from performing better. Regardless of the sport, their concerns were similar: lack of infrastructure, investment, and training for female athletes, while the men's teams have bags, clubs, and other domestic game and tournament, the women do not.

The Nepal women's football team ranks 99th in the world, much higher than the men's national football team, which is ranked an impressive 174th. Even so, the women footballers do not get the opportunities their male counterparts have to participate in competitive domestic leagues and club games to gain exposure.

The same is the case for women's cricket. Nepal's national women's team captain Isha Bhattarai commented on the lack of domestic matches and league tournaments for female cricketers in the country, even as men can now play in the upcoming Nepal Premier League (see below).

"This comes as other South Asian nations expand investment into sports, and women's sports in particular. After Nepal lost the SAFF Women's Cup, writer Preeti Rai highlighted the difference between training regimes in Nepal and neighbouring countries."

"I inspired in Bihar they have months of intensive training, and even get homework. We did not even know you could get homework in football." Rai added on to.

A silver lining, especially for Nepal women footballers, is that they are left free to play for international clubs, where they are getting income and exposure they would not get at home.

Currently, 10 players from the national women's football team were play for international clubs. Shikhar Sahana (Thane) in Mumbai joined the French Division 1 club FC Girard Sarrons playing her first match for the team in February.

Team captain Anjali Chaudhary has signed up with the Greek A Division Women's football club



The Nepal national women's volleyball team were seen at the 2024 CCA Women's Volleyball Challenge Cup in August.

Seven games national team members play for Indian clubs, and one for club in Abu Dhabi.

Rai's impressionist post on social media after the team's loss, in which she implored her fans to support the team's performance, her father in the sport, as well as the father of young Nepali girls who hope to become footballers, generated much attention on social media, and opened discussions about the state of women's sports in the country.

What also makes women athletes in discrimination with their male counterparts over the issue of pay.

Male football players used to earn more than twice the amount than their female counterparts, before ANFA decided to introduce equal pay in 2021. At present, contracted players from both the men's and women's teams receive a monthly salary of \$8,000 per month.

When the Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) announced its contract for 2024, male players earned more than twice the female cricketers. A few athletes said this was occurred this year for 20 male and 19 female cricketers, with players divided into five grades including a category for emerging players in even lower.

But although salaries for players are even lower, players receive a much \$6,000 monthly salary, that far out from the government but from former players based on what they have taken the initiative to contribute.

Money for sports tends to come only in the form of grants and cash prizes when they win, especially women, but in most sports, it is not the case. They are also often not well-served with a parole around Kathmandu to open pitches, but not if they win.

Palesha Govardhan was awarded \$1 million for the government, and got more cash prizes from the private sector for her feat at the Paris Paralympics. Women's national players who were absent at CCA's national \$400,000 each as prize.

The records are well-documented, but female athletes say investments in women's sports needs to be sustained, and better they win medals.

There is also pressure from the Nepali public to perform better, and more great athletes emerge, especially in cricket matches.

"We've heard claims that the Nepal women's team is going to play the 2027 World Cup," Anjali Chaudhary said, captain of the Nepal women's national football team, remarked indignantly at the Kathmandu press. "It might as well say that our team is going to play on the moon, given the state of the sport."

And as with most career paths for women, there are women's sports officials say they are discouraged from playing because "it is something boys do."

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Nepal's women's cricket team were seen at the 2024 CCA Women's T20 World Cup in August.

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Cricket fever gripped the nation that proved that Nepal could both play in and organise tournaments at a global level. In 2024 Nepal took part in its first international cricket tournament at the highest level in the T20 World Cup held in the Americas.

In the winter, the first ever Nepal Premier league was held. For the T20 World Cup in June, Nepali fans flew in from across the world and packed stadiums in Dallas and St Vincent and the Grenadines to witness history.

On purely results, Nepal had a terrible tournament. Defeats against the Netherlands, South Africa and Bangladesh. A game against Sri Lanka abandoned due to rain, making for a grand total of one point. Yet, Nepal's performance was anything but embarrassing. In fact, the team played underdog so well that it became local fan favorites.

Against Bangladesh, Nepal fought right to the end, with only 30 needed off the last four overs. Friendly pitches helped the strong Nepali attack against South Africa which was held to only 115. They chased that score steadily, losing eventually by only one run. And against the Netherlands, dropped catches cost the match but the Dutch were still pushed to 18.4 overs.

The theme seemed to be inexperienced batters getting carried

away in the moment, swinging wildly for boundaries instead of keeping the score moving along with ones and twos. Yet for the frenzied Nepali fans, the low scoring thrillers were as enjoyable as the high-scoring bonanzas in the boundary-happy Indian Premier League.

Six months later, in late November, cricket buzz reignited with the first edition of the Nepal Premier League. While domestic cricket tournaments had been happening for some while now, this was the first one at this scale and this level of organisation.

Eight teams: Karnali Yaks, Biratnagar Kings, Chitwan Rhinos, Janakpur Bolts, Kathmandu Gurkhas, Lumbini Lions, Pokhara Avengers, and Sudurpaschim Royals all played each other, after which the top four progressed to playoffs.



Teams were captained by a 'marquee' player, such as Dipendra Singh Airee and Sompal Kami, and some had international cricketers like Shikhar Dhawan and Martin Gupthill, albeit in the dusk of their careers. The games were covered on YouTube and on Star Sports, making for high visibility.

All the matches were held in Kathmandu to manage logistics. In the final, a strong chase from the Janakpur Yaks helped them beat the Sudurpaschim Royals, who had been the best team over the tournament.

Hardly anybody had anything bad to say about the tournament. It was an excellent example of taking stock of the resources at hand and doing the best job possible. Holding games across the country would have been excellent, but unrealistic

and over ambitious. Instead the planners kept it all in the capital, and executed, providing a strong foundation for future tournaments and improvements.

Elsewhere in sports, para-taekwondo player Palesha Govardhan won bronze at the 2024 Paris Paralympics, becoming the first Nepali athlete ever to medal at the games. And Nepalis also turned out in big numbers to watch the SAFF Women's Championship, with 1 million watching the final between Nepal and Bangladesh - although Nepal ended up losing.

The semi-final had been most interesting as well, with fans protesting so raucously what they saw as blatant refereeing mistakes that there were 72 minutes where play had to be stopped.

2025

Nepal urgently needs to be more proactive in reducing glacier hazards

MELTPOOLS

Rasuwa flood likely a GLOF

Mapping Glaciers in Real Time

Twenty-five years later, where are we? Exactly where we said we would be: with the impact of climate breakdown increasingly visible, good governance still a challenge, and the same politicians still playing musical chairs.

Four hydropower plants were damaged in the Rasuwa flood on the Nepal-China border in the first week of July, knocking out 230MW of Nepal's power supply – 8% of the total. The September flood last year was worse: the damage caused by three days of rain in central and eastern Nepal slashed Nepal's generation by 1,700MW, nearly half of the total capacity at the time.

Hydropower, while highly efficient, is unreliable in the fragile Himalayan landscape, vulnerable to earthquakes and cloudbursts. Still, Nepal continues to invest in mega hydropower plants without a proper environmental assessment. In fact, the goal is to generate 28,500MW in the next 10 years.

India has strategically removed China from all the hydropower projects in Nepal, with investments in multiple projects that give them 80% of the power generated before they officially hand them over to the country in 25 years. As it is, India is not after our hydropower, but water to regulate monsoon flow.

Diversification of the energy sector is of utmost importance. Apart from its vast hydropower potential, Nepal gets 300 days of sunlight on average for 6-8 hours per day. And

yet, solar power has hardly been explored, even when the price of solar panels has fallen.

Some experts have also suggested promoting smaller infrastructure and decentralising them. One cannot help but think back to the 'small is beautiful' model that Nepal championed in the 70s and 80s with biogas, trolley buses, solar plants, windmills and micro hydro. In many ways, Nepal was way ahead of its time but couldn't keep up when the demand soared. Among the other energy options Nepali Times covered in 2025 was Pump Storage Hydro (PSH) in tandem with solar PV as an ideal solution that will give hydro development a new and more productive life in the years ahead, as well as increasing electricity quality. 'Water is pumped from a lower reservoir or the side of river to a higher pond using cheap off-peak grid electricity or surplus solar PV power, and the stored water is then used to generate electricity during peak or no-sunlight periods,' wrote energy expert Dipak Gyawali in Nepali Times issue #1247.

DEAD HEAT

fabrics of summer

NATURENIT

Regardless, Nepal now has surplus power, but much of it is spilled, especially during the monsoon. Geopolitical tension limits the export market for Nepal's electricity but we must increase domestic demand, electrify transport, industries, agriculture, tourism. This also means the focus should now shift to transmission and distribution.

Transport, in particular, is considered a low-hanging fruit in regards to electricity use. Nepal is only behind Norway when it comes to the sales of electric cars which is 82% of the total four-wheeler imports. But unless the public transport is electrified, that won't account for much.

Meanwhile, another prevailing infrastructure challenge continues to be roads and highways. Road accidents kill seven people every day in the country, higher than most 'natural' disasters. Nijgad airport continues to be the national pride project of highest priority in every budget. However, it is not an airport project but a logging concession.

Meanwhile, trains made headlines in 2025. On one hand, we have the ambitious Kerung-Kathmandu railway, part of China's Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network. Not to be outdone, India has a final local survey ongoing for the Raxual-Kathmandu railway. But Nepal's own East-West Railway, first conceived in 2007, is still stuck on the tracks due to issues with land acquisition and environmental concerns.

What has really taken off this year is artificial intelligence. Generative AI, such as ChatGPT and DeepSeek (which come with their own biases), in just a few months since their inception, has seen rapid advancement, aided by the vast data we are feeding the system. Meanwhile, AI bots realising they are both AI, are talking with each other in a mysterious code language that only they understand.

These advancements are bound to impact Nepal, including the \$900 million we made by exporting backend IT services to the US and Europe. In the same breath, the government's digital infrastructure is so outdated and archaic that citizens have to shuttle between windows to get their documentation for ID cards or licenses for which we need multiple biometrics. 🇳🇵

THE TERRACES

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